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On the Methods and Ambitions of Poetry

IRVING SINGER:
Love in Ovid and Lucretius

MICHAEL L. GLENN:
The Room—a story

MARVIN MUDRICK:
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Interview with Anne Sexton

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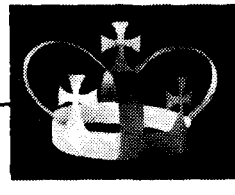
COLUMBIA  COLUMBIA

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THE Hudson Review

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WINTER 1965-66

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Notes on Contributors

ANTHONY HECHT, the well-known poet, is living in New York and working on a new book.

MICHAEL L. GLENN is a twenty-seven-year-old writer who is making his first appearance in a national magazine. He lives in New York City, has completed one novel and is at work on another.

DAVID WAGONER's fourth novel, *The Escape Artist* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), is now being made into a movie. His fourth book of poems, *Staying Alive,* will be published by Indiana Univ. Press in May.

A new collection of poems by WILLIAM STAFFORD, *The Rescued Year,* is soon to be published by Harper and Row.

Work by HERBERT MORRIS appears in recent or forthcoming issues of *Sewanee Review, The Southern Review,* and others.

DOROTHY ROBERTS has published a book of poems, *Time to Flame;* her work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies.

IRVING SINGER is on leave of absence from M.I.T. Holder of a Guggenheim Fellowship, he is currently a Fellow of the Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies, Villa I Tatti, Florence.

PATRICIA MARX has a weekly interview program on WNYC.

DENIS DONOGHUE is Judith E. Wilson Lecturer in Poetry and Drama at Cambridge University and Fellow of King's College. His most recent book is *Connoisseurs of Chaos,* a study of modern American poetry.

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN, a new contributor, teaches English at M.I.T. and is writing a book on 18th-Century poetry. He has been interested in music for a long time and "used to play a little jazz piano."

EARL MINER, Professor of English at UCLA, is the author of three books on Japan and its literature, and has a book on Dryden's poetry in press.

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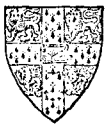

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ANTHONY HECHT

On the Methods and Ambitions of Poetry

THE THESIS TO BE ADVANCED HERE IS NOT NOVEL, and, indeed, if it has any hope of attaining to the truth of the matter, it is because so heavy a reliance is made upon pronouncements of classical authority. But I have hoped to buttress these with intuitions of my own, earned in the practice of writing, and under the tutelage of teachers, and of one in particular, whose "affable, familiar ghost" should everywhere be legible. It is the height of my ambition in these pages merely to attempt what I should hope would be a useful distinction between the arts and the sciences. I am obliged to speak parochially, as a poet, though it is my conviction that my terms will, by extension and refinement, be applicable as well to the other fine arts. For they are all concerned to produce an "aesthetic" effect, which is what I should like to try to define. And I shall have to say a few ignorant words about science, as well.

Clearly an enormous prestige attaches to the sciences in our time, and that prestige is manifest in the old fundamental, incontestable way: scientists are now a valuable commodity, and industry is competing with the government itself and with the larger universities in offering them attractive blandishments of cold cash. And when a scientist speaks his mind on matters of international politics and the larger moral issues, we listen with attention and respect, be he never so foolish. He has arrived at a position of power and authority in our society for which there seems to be no precedent in history. And the arts? Why, it is still regarded as very cultured to admire them. And perhaps a great banking house, wishing to appear to favor the higher things in life while quietly hatching dividends in its vaults, may purchase for its lobby a tasteful abstract painting, which will have the special merit of having no controversial subject matter. It is a long time now since the people of Florence bore Cimabue's altar-piece triumphantly "in solemn procession, with the sound of trumpets" from his studio

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to install in the church of Santa Maria Novella. And it is a long time since the citizens of Palestrina in one joyful body walked all the way to Rome singing a new Mass by their local composer. One cannot hope, of course, to rectify these matters. They are, I suppose, the consequences of history, and deserve, and have obtained, enormous study in their own right.

Nevertheless, if there is not honor enough for the arts today, they have their devoted following; and shall continue to have one, perhaps as long as the human race survives. For art furnishes a special sort of satisfaction, which is an aesthetic one, and therefore distinct from other sorts of pleasure. It has no utility in the normal sense of that word, and when it is sometimes perversely utilized, it ceases to perform its aesthetic function and becomes something else: propaganda or an investment. So I shall begin by asserting that art serves to arrest action rather than promote it, and to invite instead a state of aesthetic contemplation. It should be clear that the playgoer who leaves the theater saying to himself, "Oh, I see what the author was getting at; he was warning me against murdering my father and marrying my mother; I'll take note of it," has somehow seriously missed the center of the play, and has tried to turn it into a utility of some sort. As a teacher I can testify that students are forever trying to get at the "message" of a poem, which when they have discovered it, may turn out to be wholesome and improving, or occasionally tantalizingly sinister, but on the whole strikes them as platitudinous and dull. They too have missed the nature of the work, which, as a poem, is concerned to invite aesthetic contemplation more than to give advice. And this is accomplished through technique; though I hope to make clear that these techniques are peculiar to the arts and distinct from scientific techniques. There is a difference between looking at a beautiful landscape and looking at a beautiful painting of the same landscape. And while we are obliged to use the word "beautiful" in both cases, it was Kant who pointed out to us that we do not mean by it quite the same thing. Indeed, it is easy to think of persons of extreme temperament who will admit only one, to the exclusion of the other. The case of "nature lovers" who are bored by art is altogether familiar, but that inveterate collector of paintings, Gertrude Stein, is supposed famously to have said that it was good to have a fine view that one could turn one's back on. And yet

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we may generously encompass both extremes, if we are careful; for there is, after all, a relationship between them; they share for the perceiving eye what Kant has called "a certain purposiveness . . . which is not, within our act of judging, referred to any end." I shall have to return to this difficult matter presently, but I must now proceed to consider some of the artistic techniques. And I shall confine myself to literature.

A work of art is a rich and complex organization, and is, generally speaking, the better for its richness and complexity. It addresses, or should like to address, the whole of the human mind and spirit. And of course the great works can employ the grandest and most telling devices. It was both right and obvious for Aristotle to remark of tragedy that it ought to deal with an event "of a certain magnitude." But a lyric poem, though far less ambitious, can be satisfactory enough in its own way, and can hope, in its brief span, to satisfy, harmoniously and simultaneously, many of the most fastidious and exacting demands of the mind, and to delight our faculties with brilliant and moving concatenations of effects. Of these, one must surely be the rendering of the substantival particularity of the diverse elements that compose our world. Though we are constantly surrounded by them, they appear to us in poems, fresh and unbedizened, and solicit our affectionate regard for their separate and distinct identities. They compose the texture and substance of the world, and though in the world they may be utilized, in the poem they are inviolable and we can only delight in them or turn away. They offer us what Gerard Manley Hopkins called "inscape," though he was only coining a word to stand for what Duns Scotus called "haecceitas." I must pedantically intrude a bit of history here. From Plato and Aristotle through St. Thomas it had been emphatically maintained that all knowledge is composed of an understanding of the essence or "quidditas" of things. To be able to say that something is a chair is instantly to grasp its relationship to every other possible chair. And this is useful; and, no doubt, is knowledge. But as a consequence of certain doctrinal disputes over the nature of angels, in which it was finally established, for complex theological reasons, that each one was a species apart, Scotus provided his term, which is concerned to insist upon singularity, and to defy categories. There is still a nice question among epistemologists as to whether

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a knowledge of particulars can be called knowledge, and I must leave this matter to them, observing only that a knowledge of essences is scientific knowledge in that it succeeds in distinguishing between things that are alike and things that are not. But the evidence of poets has shown from the start an insistence on a local specificity which is over and above the demands of logical discourse, and can have no other effect than to require of us, not only a sense of the importance of particulars for their own sake, but a sense of their significant relationship to each other, which only the discourse of the poem can describe. And this perhaps might be a form of knowledge. But whether it is or not, it is not science. The poem wishes to pay its homage to the natural world, from which it derives and which it strives to imitate. And there is in nature a superfluity, an excess of texture which plays no necessary part in the natural economy. It may be that the bees are attracted by the color of the rose; but the rose is capable of so many exquisite gradations and modulations of color that they must surely exceed any practical end. And nature, or the power behind it, is full of such fine excesses, and finds occasion, in some famous words, "to cause it to rain on the earth where no man is; on the wilderness wherein there is no man; to satisfy the desolate waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth." Systems of theology refer this richness to some end. Poetry is sometimes more hesitant, but wishes to register such splendor, to imitate it, and presently to assign to it, in what may be the most tentative way, a sense of purposiveness.

Let me turn now to some features which poetry shares with discursive and even scientific prose: I mean syntax and diction. We must observe not only that poetry is composed of words, but that these words are common coin of the realm, used widely and promiscuously by everyone and on far less ceremonious and formal occasions than when a poet uses them. They have their own public significations and histories, which the poet undertakes to honor and respect as well as any man, and to make use, when he can, of all their multiple riches. And these words are arranged in sentences which, by the simplicity or complexity of their syntax, give weight and emphasis where they may be needed, and subordinate the smaller part to the larger. They distribute through the length of the poem a consecutive and public level of discourse, but

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offering moments of dense compression at certain points, and contrasting these with passages of fluent and transparent ease where they are wanted. In an inflected language like Latin, a poet may have enormous freedom, placing words in almost any order he likes for whatever emphasis he wishes, without any fear that their grammatical relationships will be obscured. English has not this advantage, but it has others. As for diction, it is closely related to these matters, for there are "high" and "low" modes of speech, and perhaps as many modes between as the ear can sensibly catch. Think only of the characteristic modes of speech of Caliban, Bottom the Weaver, Falstaff, Osric, Hotspur, Don Adriano de Armado, and Hamlet, who can manage them all. It has been said of poetry, probably correctly, that it goes through periodic revolutions with respect to its diction; or that, like a pendulum, it oscillates between an artificial, highly conventional, formal and "poetic" mode of speech and one that approaches what Wordsworth called "the very language of men." We have gone through just such a revolution in our time. But a hundred years before Wordsworth made his great claim for a simple diction that approximated the spoken language of ordinary men, the notion was being mocked by Dr. Johnson, who, for the amusement of his friends, improvised a parody which runs, as I remember:

> I put my hat upon my head
> And walked into the Strand,
> And there I met another man
> Whose hat was in his hand.

Then there is the matter of what may be called "tone of voice," a subject of some complexity, bearing in part upon syntax and diction, as well as upon other devices of the poem. In an obvious sense, the poem wishes to present a speaking voice delivering itself on a ceremonious occasion. For art is precisely artificial, in that it is contrived, and it seizes for its occasions something which it insists must be regarded with special attention and even formal concern. The speaking voice may find the occasion stately and almost impersonal, as in Milton's "Lycidas" or Spenser's "Epithalamion." Or it may be intimate, buzzing and gossipy, as it is in the Prologue of the Wife of Bath. It may be fancy or plain; informed and thoughtful or full of haste, passion and ignorance; it may even attempt a certain deceptive informality. And it may

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approximate to the poet's own personal convictions, or be an utter invention of his own. Add to this the fact that the speaking tone may modulate dramatically within a single poem, affording astonishing transitions, and effects which seem to declare some tentative correspondences between the most disparate parts of experience. Here, for example, is a passage from Wallace Stevens.

> He was at Naples writing letters home
> And, between letters, reading paragraphs
> On the sublime. Vesuvius had groaned
> For a month. It was pleasant to be sitting there,
> While the sultriest fulgurations, flickering,
> Cast corners in the glass. He could describe
> The terror of the sound because the sound
> Was ancient. He tried to remember phrases: pain
> Audible at noon, pain torturing itself,
> Pain killing pain on the very point of pain.
> The volcano trembled in another ether,
> As the body trembles at the end of life.
>
> It was almost time for lunch. Pain is human. . . .

It is too bad to have to cut this short, but it is a long poem and I trust the point is clear. Even so, I should like to offer another example, which uses a change of tone in a slightly different way. It is from a poem called "Prayer" by George Herbert, the whole poem being a sort of glorious definition of prayer, or perhaps a series of definitions, for the poem is really composed simply of a string of epithets for prayer.

> Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
> Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
> The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
> The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
> Engine against th' Almightie, sinners towre,
> Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
> The six-daies world transposing in an houre,
> A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;
> Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
> Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
> Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
> The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
> Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,
> The land of spices; something understood.

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I am sure it is superfluous to call your attention to the astonishing effect of the last two words, but it may not be out of place to try to say why they so astonish. There is first the fact that they are very plain and abstract after all the highly charged concretions of metaphoric language that preceded them. But there is something else, that has to do with tone. Taken in one way, after all the majestic claims of the poem, with its imagery drawn from the whole cosmos permeated with divinity, it seems a moving understatement, making the minimal case for prayer. And yet looked at from another point of view, it claims everything; for the Word became Flesh, and therefore susceptible of human understanding; and to understand the will of God is no minimal accomplishment. Moreover, the understanding may be God's, and not man's; by which it may be meant that God understands our prayers, which is not a minimal claim either. And what seems at last so moving and successful about these very ordinary words is that instead of finally requiring of us a flat and final choice between alternatives, we are allowed to hold them in our mind at once, simultaneously, without cancelling each other out. I must mention a final example. One of Shakespeare's better known sonnets is cast in the form of an elaborate compliment to a lady. It uses all the familiar Petrarchan conventions in which the lover insists that he is unworthy of the beloved, who is much nobler and more exalted than himself; and he can best express his love by publicly avowing his unworthiness; and by insisting that he shall have no claim upon her for reciprocal feelings of adoration; that, paradoxically, the lover loves most truly when he declares himself unworthy of being loved, when his position is most hopeless. One finds this notion cropping up again and again in literature of the period; it abounds in *Don Quixote*, for example. It is a noble sentiment. But what Shakespeare is doing in the sonnet, if it is read with any care, is to call the woman to whom it is addressed the cheapest kind of whore, who is interested in nothing more than getting the best bid on the open market. To be able to maintain two such diverse tones of voice, one lying deftly concealed beneath the surface of the other, is breathtakingly skillful.

I come now to that richest and most difficult of topics, metaphor, under which rubric I should want to include all the tropes and figures that poetry likes to employ. And perhaps it is as well to be-

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gin with what actually comes towards the end of Aristotle's *Poetics*, where it is said, "But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, . . ." There is seldom anything mealy-mouthed about Aristotle, and here he is certainly definitive enough. It is interesting, however, to set his statement beside one by a modern critic, Mr. Northrop Frye, who says, "The unit of . . . formally poetic thinking is the metaphor, and the metaphor is inherently illogical, an identification of two or more things which could never be identified except by a lunatic, a lover, or a poet—one may perhaps add an extremely primitive savage." One wonders why Mr. Frye did not also add, a child. In any case, the two views are sufficiently different; and we may suppose that Aristotle would have been shocked by what we, in what someone called "our incomparable modernity," may be all too ready to accept. It seems clear that Mr. Frye is echoing Shakespeare, where Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* classified "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet" as being "of imagination all compact." Now we have come to the brink of matters which fall within the province of psychiatry, and I am sure that I should be well advised to leave them alone. And I mean to do so, but must pause to remember an item that appeared many years ago in the *New York Times*. That paper reported with ill-concealed delight that somewhere in Switzerland an exhibition was held of paintings by Picasso, Braque, Miro, and several other modern masters, interspersed with works by schizophrenic patients from a local hospital, and that the visiting public, invited to fill out questionnaires about the paintings, none of which was identified, not only could not distinguish between the work of the so-called sane and the so-called insane, but inclined often enough to prefer the work by the patients. It should be said that this experiment was carried out by a reputable psychoanalytic group, but the only conclusions that they could possibly have come to would be these: that the general public, being uninstructed in detecting signs of madness when rendered in the form of painting, were unable to do so; and secondly, that the same public, being almost as uninstructed in matters of art, were unable to detect that final coherence which, for all its local discontinuities, is the indispensable quality of all good art. It is one thing for Dryden, who is echoing Plato, to say, "Great

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wits are sure to madness near allied." He is merely asserting a tradition of hoary lineage and vigorous persistence. But it should be noted as well that the tradition has more than once come into dispute, and perhaps most recently by Lionel Trilling, who, in an essay called "Art and Neurosis," is concerned to show that whatever the state of the artist's mentality may be, the act of creation is a motion in the direction of health and integration of the rarest kind, rather than otherwise.

In any case, Frye's definition is useful to me at least in this respect: it insists that metaphor is illogical. The mere fact of being illogical, however, does not justify it as a metaphor, for as Frye correctly might have said, children and savages can be that. It is pleasant and peculiarly pastoral to believe that man's highest and most noble accomplishments, particularly when they reach the aureate and transcendent levels of "genius," are in fact nothing other than the dark, inward, and primitive forces we must all acknowledge in ourselves, and that we are all mute, inglorious Miltons. But unless this potential is made manifest it is of no interest or importance. And this is so crude a way of explaining a Mozart or a Donatello that in fact it will not do. So if there is no logic in metaphor, its power and authority must reside in some other quality than mere illogicality. And of course it does. The strength of a metaphor lies in the fact that it links two otherwise incommensurate and discontinuous realms of discourse in a revealing and persuasive way. There are the grand metaphors, like "the great chain of being" which unites the whole cosmological order, and which becomes not merely a convention but is so thoroughly absorbed into the consciousness of medieval man that it ceases to be thought a metaphor, and is taken for science. And there are the smaller metaphors, which nevertheless have their full power. They have in common the fact that they bring into persuasive, revealing and even persistent relationship dimensions of our experience which would otherwise be incommensurate and without bearing upon one another. They suggest to us in the most tentative way an order and design among the disparities of the universe; they hint at a homogeneity that we all piously hope is really there, and which we predicate our lives upon, and which science must take as a basic assumption. They are the stuff of which poetry is made; but the matter does not end here. For the whole poem

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may be itself nothing more than an extensive metaphor. This is clear in the simplest form of allegory, where there is an undeviating and impeccable one-for-one correspondence between what is said and what is being represented. And this by no means simple formula may be enriched, as it is in Dante's majestic allegory, which proceeds in stately fashion upon four levels at once, in imitation, no doubt, of the Church Fathers, who found this the proper and most revealing way of reading the Holy Scriptures. Dante's particular perfection and success may perhaps only be possible in an age of faith, when it is believed that there is no part of the universe, no facet of nature, no secret action of the human mind or spirit, however wayward, that cannot finally be assimilated under the general and pervasive figure of allegory. And this is by no means to deny free will, which Dante is at pains to insist on. But of course there are other sorts of poems, less strict and punctilious in these matters than allegory, which nevertheless seem to hint rather shyly at an order among things; an order possibly benign, or hostile, or indifferent, but most often not apprehended with enough ultimate clarity to be able to characterize it at all; it remains mootly an intuition, as when, in tragedy, some outrage against the natural order (whatever that may be) having been committed, that order erupts in violence, carnage, and holocaust, and by this means extirpates the poison, to cleanse and rectify itself. This is as true of *Hamlet* and *Lear* as of *Oedipus Rex*; and the lyric poem, far more modestly no doubt, also predicates a great order, though not perhaps through action, as in a tragedy, or through assertion, as in a didactic work, but through its metaphors.

At last I come to form, and will mean by it at least two things. There is that sort of form which is determined by a well-told story, in which the events occur not necessarily in their historical sequence but in a sequence which will have its dramatic effect. Or a simpler example is the joke, which, when well delivered, will entertain the listener along the way, providing for him enough local distractions to avoid his anticipating the punch-line, towards which the whole invention has been skillfully engineered. Poetry employs this sense of form, which is essentially dramatic. Robert Frost was fond of advising young poets not to "work up to a last line." By this I think he meant several things, one of which would

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be that in writing a poem the poet should never deprive himself of a sense of freedom and improvisation by feeling that he must accommodate an inexorable and pre-determined end. Or that, psychologically, it is less enabling for a poet to start with a splendid coda and then be obliged to work backwards in order to justify it. But he probably also meant that to hit the reader over the head in the last line by arriving at a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer finish is only one of the ways, and not necessarily the most subtle one, that a poem can achieve a major effect. There is a knack in seeming to peter out, to end weakly, to know, in Frost's own words, "what to make of a diminished thing." And of course, the seeming weakness, the seeming inconclusiveness, turns out upon examination to be nothing of the sort. Frost himself is a master of this kind of form, as are some of the great prose writers; and it is not altogether unknown in music.

And so I come to the second kind of form, which concerns meter, rhyme and stanza; and I beg you to allow me briefly to be very elementary about them, for their effect can be rather more complicated and interesting than may at first appear. They are all of them musical elements, and satisfy what may be, after all, a very primitive appetite. But it is an appetite that delights to be appeased.

Meter is a kind of pattern; and a pattern is some form of regularity. And regularity makes possible anticipation. The ear runs on ahead of the eye or the sense, in the expectation that a pattern will be fulfilled in some foreseeable way. The pattern is established by convention, in part, though it is susceptible of so many and such subtle variations as to be to all intents and purposes inexhaustible. The ear learns, with training, to identify it at once, and holds it, in what may be called its ideal state, somewhere in the recesses of the inward ear, while all the variations of the actual text offer themselves in a sort of counterpoint to the ideal. That is to say, few lines in poems written in iambic pentameter are indeed in perfect iambic pentameter, but rather in some acceptable and interesting deviation from it; yet we should never know them for deviants if we did not have some notion of the ideal form in mind. A good dancer knows that in some of the more syncopated South American dances, the band may withhold rather than play certain crucial downbeats, without disconcerting the dancer who has

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caught, if I may use the expression, within his inward foot, the basic patterns of the dance. So there is already a sufficiently rich musical interest to be had merely from two lines of the same length. How much this can be enriched you may imagine by considering a complicated stanza form with lines of different length, but with the pattern remaining constant from one stanza to the next. The ear has not only to attend to the unit of the line, but to imprint within itself by the time it has gotten to the end of the first stanza, the ideal and perfect pattern of that stanza.

Rhyme works in something very close to the same way. The ear delights in resolutions. There is a story about Johannes Brahms to the effect that when he was a boy his mother had great trouble getting him out of bed in the morning, and finally hit on the infallible device of playing a diminished seventh chord on the living-room piano. Brahms, who was really awake by this time anyway, would fret and fume over the lack of resolution in the chord, and finally rush irritably downstairs to resolve that suspended music into its proper tonic and harmonious conclusion. In the same way, the ear looks forward to resolutions in rhyme; and having heard the first three lines of a poem end with the sounds *A-B-A*, it rushes ahead of the sense to the end of the next line (whose length it has already guessed on the basis of what has gone before) in hopeful anticipation of hearing the *B* sound repeated. And the poet, if he chooses, may offer you a musical form of suspense by withholding that promised *B* and giving you another *A* first; or perhaps a *C*, which will leave two sounds to be resolved. And the poet may further surprise the ear by making a given line longer or shorter than the ear was prepared to expect, so that though the desired rhyme is provided, it is still provided as a surprise. For rhyme is indissolubly linked with meter; there is no point to rhyme in prose. Even in these elementary ways I think you can see that such musical elements of poetry (and of course there are others) can provide suspense, surprise, counterpoint and syncopation of a kind which may invite our pleased and scrupulous attention, and yet while one part of the mind is indeed attending to them, others are richly occupied with other motions of the poem, its drama, its shifting and illusive tone of voice, its diction, syntax, and memorable detail. Such an abundance is calculated to fill the mind, at least briefly, and to set it at rest. And how it does this I shall come

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to in a moment; but first let me ask you to consider form as fulfilling another purpose besides the delight it offers in itself. I shall quote from an essay by Richard Wilbur, who begins here by quoting Cézanne concerning the interplay of the perceiving mind and the outer world.

> "One cannot be too scrupulous or too sincere or too submissive to nature; but one is more or less master of one's model, and above all, the means of expression." In the best paintings of Cézanne you are aware of the tremendous mass, immediacy and entity of the world, and at the same time of the mastery of the mind which got that into a frame. Every Cézanne is a moment of tension between a formative mind and a reality which that mind insists on recognizing. It is a dynamic balance, a fierce calm like that in Delacroix' fresco at Saint Sulpice of the struggle between Jacob and the Angel. Sainte-Victoire is more than any painting of it. But the important thing is to have a relation to the mountain.
>
> What is the rain dancer doing but trying to establish a *relation* to the rain? It is true that he is trying to get power over the rain for a very vital economic reason. However, since he fails so very often and still goes on dancing, there is obviously something else at stake in the dance. As Susanne Langer says, ". . . the most important virtue of the rite is not so much its practical as its religious success . . . its power to articulate a relation between man and nature . . ."
>
> The rain-dancer casts down his fingers like rain-shafts, or beats his feet somewhat as the rain tramples the earth. But it isn't really like the rain, it can't begin to substitute for what it refers to. It is not a mere imitation, but a magic borrowing of the powers it wants to approach, and a translation of what is borrowed into the language of the dancing human body. How are fingers to reproduce the concurrent precision and dishevelment of rainfall, or feet to approximate the delicate yet thudding sound of rain striking the earth? Moreover, there is so much in the dance which does not seem to refer directly to the rain at all: patterns, intervals, repetitions. Above all, the *difficulty*.
>
> Rain probably has no difficulty in falling; it ought to be the easiest thing in the world. The difficulty and intricacy in the rain-dance arises not from emulation, and not from virtuosity in the dancers, but from the difficulty—the impossibility—of achieving a direct expressive relationship with the rain, or with any other real thing. In each art the difficulty of the form is a substitution for the difficulty of direct apprehension and expression of the object. The first difficulty may be more or less overcome, but the second is insuperable; thus every poem begins, or ought to, by a disorderly retreat to defensible positions. Or rather by a perception of the hopelessness of

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direct combat, and a resort to the warfare of spells, effigies and prophecies. The relation between the artist and reality is always an oblique one, and indeed there is no good art which is not consciously oblique. If you respect the reality of the world, you know that you can only approach that reality by indirect means. The painter who throws away the frame and rebels at composition is not a painter any more: he thinks the world is himself, and that there is no need of a devious and delimited struggle with it. He lacks that feeling of inadequacy which must precede every genuine act of creation.

So that paradoxically it is respect for reality which makes a necessity of artifice. Poetry's prime weapon is words, used for the naming, comparison and contrast of things. Its auxiliary weapons are rhythms, formal patterns, and rhymes. It is by means of all these that poets create difficulties for themselves, which they then try to surmount. I can't see that any of them needs or ought to be dispensed with.

What I have offered here is in fact a sort of list, perhaps rather tediously enumerated. What I ask you not to forget is that all these poetic devices are going on at the same time, not so much like a three-ring circus, where we are likely to miss the exciting moments of one act because our attention is diverted by another, but rather like an elaborate and searching fugue by Johann Sebastian Bach, for example. Leaving aside those who think a fugue is merely complicated and wearisome (and may choose to dismiss poetry just as easily) there are those who at first may be struck by its ingenuity, or by the melody of one of its voices, or by some local modulation which is stunning and surprising. But with practice the trained listener comes to identify each voice in its own right as it follows its independent existence with what seems a splendid and original freedom; and yet at the same time to assemble them all in his mind as they move to oblige each other at every turn, and collaborate towards some end which all their richness of proliferation will justify. They seem to fulfil a destiny which not only satisfies the inexorable and arbitrary patterns of the music, but might be a perfect counterpart of the happiest of fates. Or perhaps not altogether the happiest; they have had, in their progress, to pass through certain dissonances and points of strain, sometimes so disturbing as to seem to imperil their whole enterprise, and to rebuke our confidence in their harmonious end. We must await that end before passing judgment, as Solon told Croesus we must wait for the conclusion of a life before judging

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whether it was happy or not. And what I have been at pains to insist upon is that the devices which poetry summons to its aid are fundamentally discontinuous, representing incoordinate orders of experience, which the poem, ever so briefly and tentatively, suggests must find their place in one constituent universe; and though not logically related, and not always delighted by one another's company, they move to accommodate each other, and in Kant's words, display "a certain purposiveness . . . which is not, within our act of judging, referred to any end."

And now a few words about science. I have been fortunate in having the chance of talking, all too briefly, with Professor Sachs, the Columbia University physicist, and of attending to his claims for the disinterested satisfactions to be had in the course of scientific investigations. Ever so gently he ventured to suggest that science did not always direct itself towards crass utility, and that it was able to provide for those acquainted with its language certain pleasures so formal and intricate as best to be described as "aesthetic." The word he favored was symmetry, and it is a word, as I recall, that Vitruvius liked to use in his book on the building of temples to denote harmony, fitness and proportion, and the proper subordination of the parts to the whole. And Dr. Sachs might have gone on, had he cared to, to make further claims for the beauties of science: the elegant and delicious parsimony of its formulations; its stately progress through the mind; its sense of fitness and inevitability; the way it seems to design and fulfill its own destiny by the happy and faultless confederation of all its parts. And that would not be all, for it is also capable of versatile ambiguities and of pregnant statements from which enormous riches, perhaps wholly new theories, may be extrapolated. And are not all these evidences of the economy of beauty? Perhaps, but I should have to insist that they were not enough; they would provide us with an abstract perfection which has banished the texture and particularity of the world. And moreover they would deal with items, be they never so numerous and complexly related, that belong to the same universe of discourse and experience, or with ones so closely allied as to be logically related. As for the pregnant statements, it is a nice question whether they are so by design, or whether it is simply the fact that no one has yet come along to make all their implications explicit. And if someone did,

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would the scientist still say that he preferred the compacted, implicit statement? Is it not the design of science to be explicit wherever possible? Are we ever expected to congratulate an equation upon its tact? Or a formula for its obliquity? It should be clear that I have mathematics in mind as the characteristic science, which may pride itself in its purity, and wash its hands, if it cares to, of any low utilitarian ambitions. But in this connection I must offer some words from "Reason in Science" by George Santayana.

> Mathematics, if it were nothing more than a pleasure, might conceivably become a vice. Those addicted to it might be indulging an atavistic taste at the expense of their humanity. It would then be in the position now occupied by mythology and mysticism. Even as it is, mathematicians share with musicians a certain partiality in their characters and mental development. Masters in one abstract subject, they remain children in the world; exquisite manipulators of the ideal, they may be erratic and clumsy in their earthly ways. Immense as are the uses and wide the applications of mathematics, its texture is too thin and inhuman to employ the whole mind or render it harmonious. It is a science which Socrates rejected for its supposed want of utility; but perhaps he had another ground in reserve to justify his humorous prejudice. He may have felt that such a science, if admitted, would endanger his thesis about the identity of virtue and knowledge.

Virtue and knowledge. Those words are resonantly linked more than once in our tradition of Western culture, and they may recall to you a great cry from Dante's *Inferno*. Ulysses is there, in a torment of perpetual flame among the evil counsellors for many crimes of duplicity he has committed, but not alone for them. He boasts to Dante of his restless, scientific zeal for discovery, and reports goading and encouraging his men with the following brave words: " 'O brothers!' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand dangers have reached the West, deny not, to this brief vigil of your senses that remains, experience of the unpeopled world behind the Sun. Consider your origin: ye were not formed to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.' " In our own day, whatever may have been the case in Plato's or Dante's, virtue and knowledge do not seem necessarily to march together, and indeed some strong statements have been made suggesting that they need not. When Dr. Teller undertook to defend himself against imputations of complicity in his refusal to acknowledge any

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moral responsibility for the development of the nuclear bomb, he ventured to answer that it is the job of the scientist to pursue knowledge irrespective of the consequences. This can mean either that virtue and knowledge are not related, or that there is a special sort of virtue reserved for the scientist. This may be all very well for the scientist, but for the student of virtue it will not do at all. Do not mistake me; I am not recommending ignorance, or a moratorium on scientific knowledge, even if that were possible. But neither is the scientist making a disinterested plea for knowledge for its own sake. For if he were, he should have known *how* to make the bomb without actually making it; or he should have made it without actually dropping it; or he should have dropped it without actually killing anybody. And having, through the necessity of a world conflict, been pressed beyond the disinterested search for knowledge, he should now have enough sense of the relentless and uncompromising pressures of this world to know that he is in no position to assure us that his purest and most theoretical researches may not have the most hideous practical consequences.

But the constructs of the poet are less applicable to practical adaptation, and therefore, in the short run, at least, perhaps more ineffectual. They have never killed anyone, though if we are to believe John Stuart Mill they have restored some to health. And there are other witnesses. In any case they undertake to reconcile for a moment what is natively inharmonious, dissonant, wayward and incommensurate, and they do not always instantly provide us with repose. Often enough their configurations are based precisely on tension, and on tension at a terrible and perilous pitch. They invite within the world of their discourse our sweetest triumphs and deepest desolations, and exhibit to us freshly and frighteningly all the terrible violence which may be implied in the formula of the bomb, but which that formula could never try to duplicate. But a poem could; for poems already have. And at last, in allowing us to contemplate, even within a single poem, such diversity of experience, both the good and the bad, brought into tenuous balance through all the manifold devices of art, the spirit is set at ease by a kind of katharsis, in which we are brought to acknowledge that this is the way things are, and by which is recovered for us at the end the inexhaustible plenitude of the world.

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MICHAEL L. GLENN

The Room

I

I AM SITTING AT MY DESK. The window is to my right. Through it I can see the street and the apartment house across the street. When my shades are up I can see the top floor of the building, but when they are half-down as they are now I can only see the bottom two storeys and half of the third one. I haven't yet met any of the people across the street. I haven't yet been out of my room, not since I entered it, not since I paid the old lady her rent for a month in advance and moved in with my groceries. One large rectangle of glass forms the lower half of the window, but the upper half, the half covered by the torn yellow shade, is composed of six smaller rectangles of dirty glass. There is a crack in the very top frame, to the right. But since the shades are half-way down I can't see the crack now. And it is just as good that way. I'm sure I would feel a draught on my neck from the crack if I could see it, but now, that I cannot see it, I am sure that there is no draught in the room.

It is cold. It is almost December. When I came here with my groceries, the landlady made a joke about Thanksgiving, and I laughed. But I had no turkey. I don't celebrate holidays. Every day is like the one before it to me. But that is beside the point. What matters is that it is cold. Perhaps there is no heat. If the old landlady thinks I shall put up with no heat during the coldest months of the year, she is wrong. When I see her I shall speak to her, I shall tell her that it is cold in my room, I shall not laugh at her jokes unless she promises to warm my room. I must make a note of that. But, of course, she will probably say the heat is already on and that it must be a crack in one of my windows that is causing my room to be cold. What will I say to her then? What could I answer without affirming that, indeed, there is a crack in the uppermost right pane of the window, the one which is covered by shades now. I had best not mention it at all. If I ask her to fix the window she will become angry. She will stalk about my room waving her arms around. I do not want that. I shall say nothing to her, then. I shall

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pretend I do not see her if she comes. I shall lock the door. But all this is beside the point. I was talking about the room.

My bed is on my left. It is unmade, as usual. My small stack of clothing is on the floor behind me. My books are on the bed, and some are on the floor beside it in a nice pile. My apartment has only two rooms, or rather only two sections to its one room. My desk, bed, books, window and clothing are here. The toilet and sink are in the other part, and a mirror which I bought myself from the five-and-dime store when I came is over the sink; my stove and small ice-box are there, too.

That doesn't seem to say it right. When I say stove, I can see it by craning my neck. It is my stove. In the ten days I have been here, I have grown to know it. My stove, with its four burners, round black holes, covered over with a circle of grimy metal on which I lay my coffeepot and frying pan, the circle resembling a star, a starfish whose innards are missing, but which I put over the flame anyway, because I need something on which to rest my coffeepot. But there is more to the stove than that. I am forgetting the pilot flame, burning with its blue flame like an eternal light. Last night, or the night before, I'm not sure, I watched it from my desk-chair for an hour, the blue flame, wavering slightly in the draught that must have come through the crack in the window. And then there are the stove's great white sides, there is the oven door, its dull handle spattered with the grease from something I cooked above it. There are the black legs, short and squat, on which the stove rests like some heavy bird. There are the knobs that control everything, little white knobs for turning gas on and off, which I played with at first for a while pretending they were teats until the smell of gas made me sick. One can't forget the knobs. And there is the kettle on the stove, which I brought from the other house, the one I lived at before I came here, a lightweight kettle with a piercing whistle, it holds exactly five and a-third cups of water, it is always polished, it is round. The kettle is not like the knobs, though. The knobs are uneven and hard, but the kettle is somewhat plump. The kettle is my friend. I can't say the same for the knobs. Yes, that is what I mean when I say stove. Four feet high, heavy, cube-shaped. It looks like a dwarf beside my ice-box. The ice-box and the stove looking like my Mutt and Jeff, my food and sustenance, quiet servants, masters, it doesn't

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matter which, how can a stove matter, it's always a stove, even if it's a friendly one.

Where was I? Oh yes, the room, the stove, the desk, the window, next door. Next door they are singing. They have been singing for ten days, ever since I got here. I banged on the walls, but it was no use. They must think it's amusing. It must give them pleasure, like it gave Murray pleasure when he sang his old songs, I can still hear him singing his old songs, the songs next door make me remember, I've been remembering a lot lately, things come back, all the things I'd forgotten, all the things I wanted to forget, all the things I couldn't forget, like Murray's song, like the dog, whose dog, Murray's dog, was it Murray's dog, I don't know whose dog it was, what dog, I can't start remembering the dog now, not the dog, nor the hole, the small black hole, small and oily, I can remember it now, but I should forget it, I can't be sure about that anyway, it's best to forget it, I can't forget it now, not the hole nor the dog nor the song nor the face.

I'm not to blame for any of it. I wouldn't hurt anyone, not even the old landlady, not even the people next door. If they get angry I'm sorry, but it isn't my fault, none of this is my fault, not the dog, not anything, I'm not to blame, and if I remember it's not my fault either, I can't help that.

The glass was sweating as much as he was. He took a deep breath, wiped his forehead with his sleeve, looked at the table. But the beads of sweat on his glass stayed. He didn't wipe them off. One of them began to trickle down the glass, leaving a clear stripe as it rolled, moving down, around the curve of the glass, around the bulge, and then, more quickly once it passed the bulge, rolling to the base, stopping, a pearl of water at the thick base of the glass, then, weakly, making contact with the wooden table, soaking into the grain, disappearing except to leave a dark spot, like a stain, and all the time he was looking right there, right at the base of the glass, watching the drop disappear, and not saying a word all the time.

I have to stop thinking of that. It wasn't my fault. Later, I can talk about it later. But now I have to think of other things, like the room, like the noises, like myself. For instance, I am growing bald. I can put my hand to my head, and pull out a few strands when-

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ever I wish. At a comparatively young age, I am growing bald. My nose is running too. I think I must have caught a cold from the draught in this room. And I have a pimple on my chest which, in the past day or two, has been growing. It doesn't itch, doesn't hurt, but I can feel it. I know it will grow bigger, and when it grows big enough I shall squeeze it, pop the head between my fingers. That will amuse me. Purgation, I shall call it. Then I shall wash my hands.

I am losing the skein. The song reminded me of something, of someone. Not Murray, because I have resolved to forget about Murray for a while, but about someone else, about *her*, yes, about her. It's strange. It's strange for one to treasure one image above all others, and to feel sorrow over it. But I feel it deeply. I can see her image, I can remember her story, I can see her face. Ah, Valla, woman of my youth, love.

I must control myself. If I am going to think about her I must use discretion. Too many sentimentalists are running about as it is. My passion was not like that. Valla, what would you say if you could see me now? Would you laugh, or sing? I think you would. Then it is just as well that I left you, that you left me, that it ended between us, all because of, because of what, of a black circle, of a small circle, of a laugh perhaps. Valla, shall I tell about it now or not? Shall I think about it?

First I'll raise the shades, so I can look out while I think, so I can see the people walking around. Valla, would you like it here in this room?

It was at least ten years ago, maybe more, I'm not sure. Time doesn't matter that much anyway when it's behind you. I was young at the time. I was lonely, too. My father had remarried after my mother's death, and I felt I was no longer welcome at the house. Besides, I had finished college, and I wanted to be out in the world on my own. For almost two years I had lived by myself in an apartment like this one, off a main street in a rather large town. I made a living by teaching English in a public school, but I hated the work. At the end of the term I handed in my resignation. With the little money I had saved I planned to keep myself in bread and coffee for a few months while I decided what to do. I had the intention to write.

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(This is not the story of Valla, I'm telling the story of Murray. I don't like that story at all. It sounds just like all the other stories I ever heard, and I know the ending already. It is very sad. I have to tell the right story. I'll start again, anywhere, the middle perhaps.)

I met Valla by accident one night.

No, that really isn't so. I waited a long time to see Valla, I used to watch her walk down the street, I was too timid to talk to her, it was only by following her to her house, without her knowing it, that I found her last name, on the mailbox, and, by looking up the last name in the phone book and checking it against the address which I knew, that I found out her first name, Valla, which stayed on my lips from then on. Even then I did not speak to her. When she walked past me, my lips formed the syllables, Valla, but I made no sound. Some evenings I watched her house to see if she had a boy-friend, lover or suitor, but she had none of these. One morning I followed her to work, and found out she was a librarian. From that day, I made it a point to go into the library once a day. It was inevitable that she should begin to notice me. I waited for the right moment to speak to her. I knew that once I had spoken the delicious period of waiting was over, and I would have either made contact or lost it. There could be no second tries, I felt.

How many times did I rehearse each gesture, each accent of my speech. How many nights did I spend, my head tightly in my pillow, thinking of the words I should say. Then, finally, one sunny autumn day when the trees outside the library window were in full color, I spoke to her, I made my move. And she answered. She smiled. I saw her lips quiver. I was beside myself, in ecstasy.

That was how it began. Yet it seems I have told it too quickly. Each moment of expectancy, of fear, of hope, each moment of longing should be re-lived. After all, it is the only love of my life. I'll have to tell it again, go over it and try to explain.

No good. It was doomed to failure. Even Murray could not bring me back to my senses after it all happened. And it was I who left her, not she who left me, regardless of what I say later or said before, because now, telling the story, I remember clearly, I know how it all happened, I know I left her, because I was too delicate for her, for anyone, was then, and am now, because I had to leave her, the only love I ever had, the only woman who ever loved me,

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all because of what I could not help seeing, could not help hearing, all because of my own self, because I have been and shall always be that way.

I am that way now. I am solitary, egocentric. I know it. It's like a cloud in my brain.

The walls of my room are blue. From the yellow ceiling hangs a large bulb at the end of a slim metal chain. There is no lampshade. If my back were not to the lamp, there would probably be a lot of glare. My bed, as usual, is unmade. By my hand is a clay ashtray, orange, with three butts of varying sizes dumped in it. The ashtray stands on three legs. Its inside is almost pink, but the rim has been blackened from having many cigarettes tapped in it. It resembles an open mouth.

The shades are up. I can see all the way to the top of the building across from mine. Most of the blinds are drawn. I expected that. People in this neighborhood keep their shades down, especially after dark. Now, even though it is not dark, most of the blinds are drawn. It gets me mad. I have always peered into windows. There's nothing wrong with it. I just like to watch people, from a distance, see what they're doing.

Some old woman is out walking. Her head is bent into the wind. She looks like a nail someone hit with a hammer. Dressed all in black, the way European women are always dressed, she looks like she's going to someone's funeral. She's going to the corner now, heading for the store to get some eggs and butter.

There's that dog again. He's following the woman. When I first came here, he barked at me, showing his yellow teeth. Now I hate him. I see him a lot from the window, and whenever he sees me he lifts his big black head and howls. During the day he lies on his owner's porch. I don't know what he does at night. Perhaps the next time I go out, if I go out for food, if I get hungry, I shall try to make friends with him. I know how to do it. A few days ago, a little girl called to him, and he came over. She stood quite still and extended one hand towards that monster. He crept closer and thrust his wet nose against the girl's hand. She still did not move. Then she began to speak some kind of baby talk, and the dog listened. Within a few seconds the girl was patting his head. He was conquered. It's disgusting. Evidently it's very easy to make friends

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with that animal if one wants to. Now I do not think I want to, not that animal, not with his head

tilted at a slight angle from the line of the rest of his body, his eyes looking upward, his tongue lolling out, his black fur matted together at his neck, glistening,

no, not at all, not that dog. Look at him following the old woman, padding along behind her. It would be funny if he ate her, but I doubt that would happen.

They are still singing. Where was I? I was telling part of a story from my youth, what kind of story, what kind of youth, negligible, insignificant, poignant only to me. It's true, about being poignant, all my stories are poignant to me, I get tears in my eyes over any of these stories, I can't help it, they're my stories, to me they're beautiful.

II

If I am to tell stories, I shall have to apply some order to the process. I shall have to tell them from beginning to end, or from end to beginning, for that is how stories are told. It is ridiculous to try being different. After all there are rules in everything.

I shall warm up first. This is a short story which actually happened. It will serve as the introduction to the longer, more poignant story I shall tell later, the story I can't get out of my mind even now. It is called THE EGGS.

Once, several days ago, a man, I, was hungry. It was late in the evening, after dinner, and nearly into the early morning. What was there to eat? The man went to his cabinet, took out his frying pan, and took some butter from its place on the third shelf in the ice-box. He put a large pat of the butter in the pan, which he then placed on his stove. The heat went as high as it would go, and a blue flame darted from the pilot to the burner and spread out fan-shape beneath the pan. The man, I, went next to the top shelf of the ice-box, and returned with a small carton of eggs, half-empty. Ah, even now as I tell the story, I can still feel the man's excitement, my excitement of several days ago. An egg. A beautiful, smooth egg held in one's hand. Can there be anything more lovely? Can there be anything which gives greater pleasure?

The butter was crackling in the pan, sending small yellow-

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brown bubbles above its hot surface. With a quick and dextrous motion, the man cracked the egg on the side of his frying pan, and, with one hand, spread the segments of shell apart so that the egg could drop, unemcumbered, into the pan. It fell perfectly into the hot butter. The plump yolk was exactly centered in the pool of albumen, like a yellow flower in a pond. The egg began to cook. The albumen began changing from a jelly-like mass to a white ring, like a lacy collar around the yolk.

The man discarded the egg-shell into a brown paper bag at the foot of the sink. Then he reached gravely into the carton again. He chose a fine, smooth, brown-shelled egg and repeated the same ritual. Once transported to the stove, the egg soon dropped gracefully into the pan beside its brother. Both were cooking, together. It was a spectacle to behold and admire.

The man let the butter fry the edges of the eggs, and once or twice he tilted the whole pan so that the butter could trickle inwards in the direction of the yolks. When a brief few seconds had passed, he grasped a spatula in one hand and held the pan with his other. The eggs seemed done on one side. With a skillful, rapid movement, he flipped the eggs over to their other sides. Oh how they sizzled! The yolks held firm.

Ten seconds more, and he turned off the flame, lifted the pan from the stove, and deposited the eggs on a plate which was lying on the table. What a lovely sight they made, the two eggs. Like two eyes, two breasts, two hands: two eggs. With salt and pepper, and a dash of paprika the eggs were prepared further. When all seemed done, he raised his fork to his lips in a prayer of thanks. Then he lowered the fork to the plate. Soon, the eggs were gone. The first egg was eaten alone, by itself, plain. The second was dispatched in company of a modest chunk of black bread and butter.

Oh! How good it was. How lovely! How rich and creamy was the yolk, and how crisp were the edges fried in butter! The bread sopped up the remaining yolk. The plate was spotless. The meal was done.

For a brief moment, an all-important moment, the man felt as if life had a goal, a purpose, a sense to it. If only because he had eaten such eggs and might, the next day, eat two others like them, if only because of this, he was ready to go through the dark night until the next day came. There was true hope, in the shape and taste of an egg.

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An egg exists to please. It does not ask to be pampered. It does not ask to be fed, to be dressed, to be considered, to be complimented. Its entire purpose in life is to be eaten and to be enjoyed. An egg is an instrument of love, there's no denying it. The egg loves whoever eats it; whoever eats it, loves the egg. There is no whining, no false promises, no placating. In short, this noble man reflected that, given a choice between a woman and an egg, only a fool would not choose the latter.

Having thought this, the man, fatigued by now from the intensity of his experience, wiped his lips and, with a last sigh of pleasure, walked into his bedroom. There he slowly undressed and went to sleep. His dreams were happy, and his sleep was unbroken.

That is one of my favorite stories. I tell it because I like it. In that short story are embodied the simple principles by which I now live my life.

Great pleasures are to be had among everyday things, if one looks for them. In the form of an egg, in the warmth of a bath, in the smoothness of clean bed-linen can be found perfect joy. The only complications in such a life come from without, such as the incessant singing noise from next door or the incredibly ugly face of my landlady. But more of that later.

Now that I have hinted at my secrets, I am free to tell my longest story. I have been remembering bits of it, more and more, during these last ten days. A scent, a color, a face, is enough to set it all off.

The moon lit up the last window to the right. It was dark, but vague outlines were visible. A silver-colored hand moved over the window-frame on its way to the arm of the sofa. And suddenly, framed by the shining glass, a face appeared.

The sun is going down in the West, and the sky is very blue. Soon it will be dark. I can already see lights behind some of the shades across the street. For some reason the singing has stopped. They seem to be listening to me next door, wondering what I am doing. Now they are laughing. Yes, and now they are going on. One of them has put a record on the phonograph at its loudest volume, and they are all singing with it, following the leader,

like a summer in Italy. She had been sitting in the chair a long

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time. Now she rose from it, stretched her hands over her head, leaned back. Her fingers loosened her hair from its tresses. Dark hair fell over her bare shoulders. She wanted to play a record. ("Piacere?") When it was playing, she began to dance, and her body undulated like a ten-cent hula doll. ("Lei?") Somewhere behind me the two chambermaids peeked from the half-open door, the dark one with hair tangled on her legs and the blonde, the tall blonde, who wanted to be a movie star. When she came towards me I, not knowing anyone was watching, reached out my hands towards her hips. I was accepting her invitation. We didn't speak for a few moments. We danced, and she was humming the song's melody. But then one of the chambermaids, the short dark-haired one or the tall blonde, giggled, and I turned around to see who it was. The girls ran away. When I looked back at *her*, she was laughing, too, and the record was no longer playing. The room was quiet. There was noise coming from the outside, though. Now I was blushing. ("Ebbene, cara, come si chiama?") And then I knew I had transgressed, stumbled into a situation I couldn't control. ("Wanda," she said.) The floorboards seemed to groan as she passed over them. A wave of the hand was for me. She opened the door of room number six and closed it behind her. A thin sliver of face still peeked from behind it as it closed, and I could see the expression in the one eye visible, an expression of disdain, mockery, contempt, I could feel it all the way into the parlor where I stood, not knowing what to do, by the phonograph which had stopped playing, while those two chamber-harpies clanged dishes together in the kitchen.

Why am I thinking of that? Have I then retained my memory, am I going to be taunted by scenes like that for the rest of the day, of the night, do I have to re-live all my old mistakes, the ones I couldn't help doing, the ones I was ignorant of when I did them, the ones I now understand, am I to be taunted by memory, when memory should be pleasureful and not tormenting, with the result that I am deceived by my own self, the self I wish I could forget, which I cannot forget?

Where was I? Before, before they had put on the records, when the sun was still above the top of the apartment building across from my window whereas now it is below it so that there is no glare, but the sky is getting redder and redder all the time as if

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there were a fire somewhere. I was trying to tell about myself, in an orderly way, starting the farthest back, with Valla, but Valla wasn't the farthest back, that was Murray, although Murray was both before and after Valla, and Wanda was before only, or was it after, I'm not sure, all these things happened so long ago, so far ago, how can I be sure of them, how can I be sure of anything, I, who only know that I am in a room outside of which on the right is a street and on the left is another room where they sit, the ones who keep on singing, and that I am at my desk, and that if I turn my head a hundred-thirty-five degrees to the left I shall be able to see the blue flame of the pilot on my stove, this is what I know, and at times I even question this, and, if I cannot be sure of the flame in the room, how can I be sure about the stories, be sure if they are so, or if the sequence is really as I think? For I may think today that Wanda came before Valla, and tomorrow that Valla came before Wanda, and yesterday it may have been that Valla and Wanda were the same person, and that is just as plausible as it is not, so how can I know, and how can I be sure? So why not take it as it comes, memory, and let the scenes follow what they will, because it's all me, I know that, it couldn't be not-me, because there is only me here in this room, and if there is also any face or any scene, then that face or scene must in some way be me, too, or else I would have to believe in spontaneous creation and worms coming out of rotten milk and things like that, which everyone knows cannot be, even I, I who am, who am in this room, who must choose now and go on, I cannot get stuck, I must go on. I started with Valla, I see her again, Valla the librarian, Valla the dark-haired girl whom I followed one day from her job, after I had spoken to her, the day we talked together, as we walked through the fallen leaves.

"My name is Valla."

I told her mine. We were on a residential street that led from the main road to a district of our town where librarians, students and unemployed artists lived. The houses on this street were set back from the sidewalk by their lawns, and trees stood between houses and in the front yards like domestic gods. A man raking leaves waved to us as we passed. The smoke from his fire of dry leaves filled the air about us with a strong, autumnal scent. Two

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children were on his front porch, playing a game with some sticks. They, too, waved at us, imitating their father in the way they moved the fingers of their right hands from the tip of their foreheads just below the hair-line, upwards, frontwards, and to the right in a precise arc, while their forearms, which had thus far been bent, straightened themselves out, until their fingers and hands were extended out towards us at the end of completely extended right arms. All this was accompanied by a large smile from each child, as it had been from the father. I smiled back, feeling very much a part of the day, the weather, the street, the people.

"They're cute, aren't they?" Valla said, waving to them.

"Yes," I said.

I had followed her out the library door that day. I walked behind her at first, but then I caught up to her. She seemed to recognize me. I fidgeted a moment, and then asked her if she'd mind if I walked a little way with her. She said it would be all right. And now we were walking together.

"I've seen you quite a bit at the library," Valla said. "You come in there often."

When she spoke, her lips formed the syllables of each word. Yet she did not speak slowly. Or, even if she did speak slowly, I was nevertheless entranced by the beauty of her voice and did not mind having to wait for the entire sentence. In fact I enjoyed prolonging the pleasure of each word. At the word, "you," her whole face centered about her puckered mouth, her eyes seemed rounder and brighter, and the sound of her voice seemed to hover in the air like a small ring of smoke. The slight down on her upper lip made this motion all the more charming by encircling her lips above with a darker band, while a dark spot just below her lower lip seemed to be a natural counterweight to it. Spot, down, shadow, and hue: all made her mouth a thrilling object. I was enchanted.

"I live to the right," she said.

We both turned down a very small street, almost an alley. The houses here were no longer suburban-type; rather, they were older and more crowded buildings. I kept step with her. She couldn't know how happy I was. In the short time we had been walking, I had told her about my family, about the job I had just abandoned in the hopes of doing something better, and about the year I had spent in Italy and France. This last bit impressed her. She had

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never been out of her home-state. Her mouth formed an incredulous "O" when I described Paris to her.

"And you have really been there!" she said. "That's wonderful. I wish so much I could go."

"Yes. And it's everything it's supposed to be."

She shook her head. "I don't think I'll ever be able to get there."

I assured her that she would, especially since everyone was getting a chance to see Europe these days. I laughed when she laughed, I turned when she turned, I believed all my waiting had not been in vain. I did not, of course, tell her how long I had watched her from the opposite side of the street when she went walking, how I had hid behind iron gates when she passed so as to sniff her perfume, how I had waited outside her house at night watching for visitors, how I had constructed fantasies in my mind at all hours of the day, fantasies in which I would conquer her and find in her everything I had always wished to find. No, I told her nothing of that. It would have frightened her away, I'm sure of that. It would have frightened anyone away, all the tricks and games I played, all my thoughts, my observations, my obsessions, no one could really understand them but myself, and that is why I kept them from her, tried my best to portray myself to her as I knew she would want me to be, she, a lovely and lonely girl, undoubtedly given to fantasies herself, but hers of a totally different order from mine, and those fantasies, hers, being the ones I had to satisfy. I had to portray myself as the loving and gentle creature of her dreams, I had to hide every part of myself that was incongruous with that picture, I had to lie, to laugh at foolish things, to pretend, to tell her about places I had been, about places I had never been, I had to support her breathless wishes, and all because I liked her, because I had myself grown attached to the myth, to the dream, to the fanciful image that creeps every so often in youth into one's mind, threatening to blind one to the realities of the world, I had to satisfy my own dream (or disprove it) in satisfying her own. It was a sordid business. And I am happy now that it has ended. I can only go so far, in spite of what my dreams may require. After all, so far and so much, and past that no further. I say all this by way of explanation, not that I feel badly about it, for I do not, I am happy about it, but because I simply could not go further with it, it had to end, that black circle, her sensual mouth,

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her lips, dark and oily with cosmetics, I could only accept so much, what attracts one is usually the repulsive, and it was that way with me, I offer no excuses, I am just explaining now, about how we went walking the first day I spoke to her, when she thought I had never thought of her until I spoke, "by accident," in the library, as I was returning a book of Napoleon's *Memoirs*, and attracted her attention, when in reality, as I knew and did not say, I had planned the moment carefully for weeks, planned it even to her reactions, even to following her out of the library that day and asking to walk beside her, yes, all of it, every action, every word, was planned, as it had to be, everything was planned, and she thought it was all sudden and spontaneous, because, you see, she *had* to think it was sudden and spontaneous, that was her dream, her myth, and it was that to which I played, sordidly, treacherously, in grandiose, hypocritical fashion.

"You know, I've often wondered who you were," Valla said. "I see you almost every day at the library."

"I see you, too. You know," I said, "I was hoping we'd have a chance to speak. And then, today, all of a sudden, everything just happened." (Here I smiled.)

"Yes," she said. "It's so funny things happen that way." (And her mouth, on the last word, "way," opened wide so I could see her teeth and gums and even the wiggly uvula far down inside.)

At this point an old man, bald and doddering, walked past us. He used a cane to support himself. For an instant he raised his eyes, as if reflecting on our identity. Then, he lowered them again to the ground, where his feet, shod in a pair of dirty, torn, badly-scuffed shoes, slid one after the other through the leaves which littered the sidewalk that day like confetti after a parade. Was he humming a song? I cannot remember. Let us say that he was.

Valla nodded at him. She smiled just as she had smiled at the man raking leaves. All friendliness and cheer on the surface. "Nice old man," she whispered to me as he passed. I said nothing, although I did smile. She took a deep breath and commented on the smoky smell, and on how winter was around the corner.

It was growing dark. People who had already come home from work were in their houses, and the lights were on in almost every house we passed. I had never before realized how romantic, how poignant was the twilight. The sinking sun made the sky redder

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and redder, and the clouds began to be filled with colors. Shadows got longer. The air seemed more fragrant.

I walked Valla home and left her at the door. It was understood that we would do the same thing the next day, meeting at the library return-desk and then walking out together when the clock on the wall directly over her amber-varnished desk stretched its hands as far apart as possible, signifying that it was six and time for the lights to be turned out and for everyone to go home. We would walk out together, not separately as we had done that first day, for from that first day on the contact had been made, and it was only a matter of time as to how far the relationship would develop, if it did not end.

After she closed the door that night, I remained outside it for a while, thinking how I had spoken to her at last. I recalled the many evenings spent watching the door from a doorway further down across the street, knowing that behind the door was my Valla, knowing that she was even then telling her mother how she had met a gentleman coming home from work that day, someone she had often seen in the library before, and her mother, suspicious, saying, What does he look like, Is he rich, Just what do you know about him, Are you going to see him again, while she, Valla, bustled about, taking off her coat and hanging it in the closet, going to her room where whatever mail she had received that day was carefully laid on the fold of her bed beneath the pillow, washing her face with warm water, wiping it with her red towel, the one with a deep-hued carnation in the lower corner, returning to the kitchen-dining room where her mother was ready to ask her more questions while they both prepared the dinner they would eat later, together, sitting one on one side of a small wooden table and the other facing her from the other side, with only the kitchen light on in the whole house because they saved money that way, while outside it grew darker and darker and the stars came out and the moon grew from a shy silver to a rich golden color, and the street that ran right and left from the small walkway to the door was quiet, because it was night, and even I, who had stood for a while outside the door, thinking, even I had gone home to my own rooms, gone away from their street, gone away from their talk, yet knowing they were still talking of me, knowing she was still thinking of me, just as she, Valla, was on my own mind as I pre-

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pared my dinner and planned the steps I should "spontaneously" take the following day so that she would begin to like me, trust me, confide in me, even love me. And so, that night, each of us went to bed, thinking (she later told me this was definitely the case, as I had expected) of the other and wondering what the next, the following days would bring.

It is getting dark in my room now, and the story is going nicely. I have stopped because something is happening outside my window. The young married woman who lives on the second floor has come out on her porch to take in the few things she hung on her line this afternoon. She is a thin woman, unattractive except for her legs, which she usually covers with sheer black stockings. They probably excite her husband. Right now, she is attempting to take down some stockings, two pair, from the short clothesline she has rigged up on the balcony-porch where she undoubtedly suns herself during the summer. She stretches up, her arms are reaching high over her head. This pulls her black sweater up, so that there is a narrow strip of bare skin just above her waist. I can see her belly. Her small, high teats are even smaller and tighter as she reaches up. She doesn't know I'm here. Now she reaches down into the straw basket she has carried out and puts the stockings in it. She is going to take in a few pairs of silk panties next. I watch her. She stretches again, and again I can see her midriff, again I can almost feel the tautness of her breasts and the willowy quality of her legs as she stands on tiptoes. Her face is plain, but I don't mind. These are the pleasures of life. These are my rights and privileges, to watch what goes on in the world outside my windows.

Oh. She has just noticed me. She looks angry. She has just pulled her sweater down over her bare belly, indignantly; who does she think she is, who does she think I am, where is she going? She is going indoors. That's the end of the laundry. What if she tells her husband? No, she wouldn't tell him. Perhaps she would. But what could he do, nothing, he couldn't bother me at all, and if he came up here fuming I wouldn't let him in.

Perhaps the husband is next door now, singing with the others. Perhaps the woman wasn't really taking in clothes, but just enticing me, making me stare at her, and at the same time giving a signal to her husband who was watching her from the next-door win-

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dow, waiting, until he too could give the signal for everyone to start singing louder, to start banging on the walls, just as they are doing now, so that I can hardly think, so that I almost forget about my own stories which they have interrupted. Now I shall go on. I shall forget the woman with the small, high teats and the bare midriff and the willowy legs, she's gone into the house anyway, I won't even look through the window for a while, if that will be possible. If she or her husband or the people next door want to make trouble, let them, let them bang their fists against the wall, let them shout and sing, but I won't apologize, I won't stop, after all I'm perfectly within my rights, I know that, just as I was within my rights with Valla, and with Murray, yes, even with Murray.

Now the dog from across the street is looking up at me through my window. I see him. What is he doing there now, staring at me as if he knew something I didn't want known. I never thought dogs had good sight, but he can always find me at my window, and he stares, that big terror of a dog.

And now the dog is lying in the street, right in the middle of the street, where the cars pass. He does this often. In a few minutes he will be rolling over from side to side, flexing his hairy paws, flapping his pink tongue from right to left as he rolls. He will snap at flies. He will feel secure on his back. He may even wag his tail. But he does not know that in a few minutes he will still be on his back, unable to move, his spine crushed without mercy into the hard pavement of the street. A car makes a dreadful mash of any animal. And from mine, I can look through the window, over the steering wheel, though the window, and see

him looking up at me. I wonder if he belongs to the woman who was taking in her wash, whose husband is probably next door, banging on my wall while the others are singing. I shall shut them all out. I shall close my window. I already know how to get up from my desk, it is easy, and with my right hand I can pull the shade all the way down, steadily, just by tugging on the small circle of string tied to the dangling shade-cord, tugging with my finger in the small hole of white cord almost black from the dirt of this apartment which the old landlady has not cleaned in months. And then the shades will be drawn, and I will be untouchable, safe in my dark corner.

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DAVID WAGONER

Speech from a Comedy

(Scene: The wreckage of Heaven)

I am God. But all my creatures are unkind to me.
They think of themselves. Why don't they think of me?
I'm holier than they.
(*Chorus*) God is lovely.
If I descended and rode through the streets,
Would they take off their hats?
No, they'd keep their hands in each other's pockets.
(*Chorus*) God is out of sorts.
Or if I showed up to give a formal address
Including an enormous amount of sound, godly advice,
They'd turn and wriggle away like a school of fish.
(*Chorus*) God is endless.
I burned myself in a bush once. Day and night,
I burned like a pillar of virtue in the desert.
I even let them watch me ride in my chariot.
(*Chorus*) God is great.
I gave them Aaron's rod when they were on the rocks.
I plagued their enemies with a thousand dirty tricks.
I let them burn rams in thickets instead of their precious Isaacs.
(*Chorus*) God is on their backs.
When things looked so black they couldn't tell his from hers,
I parted the waters,
Saving a few. But drowning a lot of others.
(*Chorus*) God is feeling worse.
Didn't I die for them?
Hang myself? And shed the Blood of the Lamb?
What more could I do? Try it yourself sometime.
(*Chorus*) God is sublime.
Now they forsake me. Leave me up in the air.
Sinning. Thinking of pleasure.
The more I leave them alone, the worse they are.
(*Chorus*) God is pure.

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They lie all night in their houses stacked in rows,
Their knees pulled up, their heads stuffed into pillows,
Imagining new ways to break my laws.
(*Chorus*) God is jealous.
When I show them a bad example, plastered and confused,
Chances are he'll be headlined and idolized.
The only law of mine they like is getting circumcised.
(*Chorus*) God is not amused.
I didn't ask for anything impossible.
I said, "Love me—and not just once in a while."
But all men were created fickle.
(*Chorus*) God is immortal.
I'll settle with Everyman.
I had his dinner all laid out in my mansion,
But *he* had to try cooking his *own*.
(*Chorus*) God is burning.
Just because angels are blasé and neuter,
Did he think I'd be contented forever and ever
Playing with Ezekiel's wheel or climbing up and down
Jacob's ladder?
(*Chorus*) God is boiling over.
I made him in my image, didn't I?
I gave him my tooth for a tooth, my eye for an eye.
How could I turn out such an unreasonable facsimile?
(*Chorus*) God is mighty sorry.
He'll be made to see the way things really are.
If he's so fond of slaughter,
I can get it for him wholesale just by losing my temper.
(*Chorus*) God's a man-of-war.
I might have shown him mercy,
But nobody asked me.
The best things in Heaven are costly.
(*Chorus*) God is free.
All right, he's dug his bed. Now let him lie in it
A thousand years at a stretch on a strict diet
While worms with their noses on fire pay an endless visit.
(*Chorus*) God is like that.
I watched over him like a shepherd over a sheep

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While he went bleating and gambolling and flocking around
and getting fleeced, forgetting whom to worship.
Well, every shepherd knows his way to the butchershop.
(*Chorus*) God is in bad shape.
Come, Death. He has made me mad.
I summon Death. For his ingratitude,
Everyman must choke on his daily bread.
(*Chorus*) God is sick and tired.

House-Hunting

The wind has twisted the roof from an old house
And thrown it away,
And no one's going to live there any more.
It tempts me:
Why not have weather falling in every room?
Isn't the sky
As easy to keep up as any ceiling,
Less flat and steady?
Rain is no heavier, soaking heavy heads,
Than a long party.
Imagine moonlight for a chandelier,
Sun through the laundry,
The snow on conversation, leaves in the bed,
Fog in the library,
Or yourself in a bathtub hoping for the best
As the clouds go by,
Dressing for dinner according to what comes down
And not how many.
And at night, to sit indoors would be to lose
Nothing but privacy
As the crossing stars took time to mark their flight
Over the mind's eye.

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The Circuit

My circuit-riding great-grandfather
Rode off on horseback through the hickory woods
Each week to galvanize five Methodist churches,
And once, passing a Sabbath-breaking auction,
Shouted over his shoulder, "Fifteen cents!"
They caught him miles away
And saddled him with an old grandfather clock.

What got you up on your horse in the morning, sir?
Did you rehearse damnation
Till the trees fell crossways like a corduroy road?
Did anyone catch his death, as you caught yours,
Coming to hear you freezing in a shed?
Nobody mentions anything you did
Except the clock—no name-dropping of God,
No chiming adage. A joke thrown back of a horse
Has lasted longer than your rules and reasons.

I saw you stiff as a tintype in your bed
Next to a basin and a worn-out Bible,
Your beard aimed at the ceiling like a sermon.
Over the distance I can hear you shouting,
"Where in the name of God is the Name of God
In all these damned unsingable useless poems?"

Your family fought harder for the clock
Than they did for souls, and now they know its face
Better then yours, having replaced the works.
Beards are no longer hanging out of pulpits;
If God speaks from a bush, it's only by chance.
I shave my face and wait,
But bid for every clock I lay my eyes on
Just for the hell of it, your Hell and mine.
Like you, I'm doing time in the hard woods,
Tracking myself in circles, a lost preacher.

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Working Against Time

By the newly bulldozed logging road, for a hundred yards,
I saw the sprawling five-foot hemlocks, their branches
crammed
Into each other's light, upended or wrenched aslant
Or broken across waists the size of broomsticks
Or bent, crushed slewfoot on themselves in the duff like
briars,
Their roots coming at random out of the dirt, and dying.

I had no burlap in the trunk, not even a spade,
And the shirt off my back wasn't enough to go around.
I'm no tree surgeon, it wasn't Arbor Day, but I climbed
Over the free-for-all, untangling winners and losers
And squeezing as many as I could into my car.
When I started, nothing was singing in the woods except me.

I hardly had room to steer—roots dangled over my shoulder
And scraped the side of my throat as if looking for water.
Branches against the fog on the windshield dabbled designs
Like kids or hung out the vent. The sun was falling down.
It's against the law to dig up trees. Working against
Time and across laws, I drove my ambulance

Forty miles in the dark to the house and began digging
Knee-deep graves for most of them, while the splayed head-
lights
Along the highway picked me out of the night:
A fool with a shovel searching for worms or treasure,
Both buried behind the sweat on his forehead. Two green
survivors
Are tangled under the biting rain as I say this.

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Near the End of the Party

The party, spilling slowly over the terrace
Along the steps, is running down the garden
Onto the lawn—men taking a little something
With them for luck against the growing night
Behind their backs, the women following,
Their heads nodding like flowers over flowers.

The plots laid out in the dark in all directions
Go on past winning and losing arguments.
Hazy together, lips run out of words.
The grass is yielding gracefully underfoot.
And slipping sideways, straight from the shoulder now,
The vaguest necklines take the plunge to heart,

And the first to pour himself out on the ground
Is lying still as a perennial border.
The sprinkler, like a melting chandelier,
Spins on itself and darkens. Under the wind,
Over and over like the ghosts of moles,
The napkins tumble through the flowerbeds.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Some Autumn Characters

I

Rain finds lost beach toys, on
open autumn days displays them
to stare through their sky window
while uninhabited islands hear crisp Rain
come toward them, their caretaker all winter
everywhere in the woods trying
to fasten down the leaves.

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II

Cold, a character I used to know
in Wyoming, raps every night
at doors of lonely farms, moans
all night around the barn, and cracks
his knuckles late, late,
at the bedroom window.

III

And One Afternoon each year
is yours. It stands again
across a certain field and is the same—
a day no year can hold, but always
warm, paused in the light, looking
back and forward, where everything counts
and every bush, tree, field, or
friend will always wave.

Carols Back Then: 1935

Clouds on the hills. I hear a throat voice,
chiming like Ella's from that quicksand year
soon to be gone if I do not recall
the cold and the carols that rang Christmas there.

Walls are closing round that corner scene,
the street turning to iron where we sang like a bell,
and even our classmates are shrugging away.
I stand on the curb and remember it all—

That song, the star that came near and stayed,
the hulking town we walked through that night.
I can turn to it, being true to the sign,
quietly insisting with all of my life,

That life those around me now can't know.
Ella, our town is all filling with snow!

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On Her Slate at School

On her slate at school my mother wrote "Winter."
When she ran home the weather erased it.
For all the pain my mother saw in the world,
over her face the snow has exploded its little flowers.

"This is the part of the year," she called to us,
"excluded from tree rings: children, remember!"
Around our house were such tall legends,
everything carved by winds and rivers.

Even today they carve, the temporary winds,
the prevailing rivers; and a giant in disguise
still knocks at our chimney. For awhile, children,
the trees around us have those years in them.

Strangers

Brown in the snow, a car with a heater
in it searches country roads all yesterday afternoon
for our farm. At crossroads the car stops
and over the map the two people bend.
They love how the roads go on, how the heater
hums. They are so happy they can be
lost forever that afternoon.

They will probably live.
They may die. The roads go on. On the
checkered map they find themselves, and their
car is enough audience, their eyes enough
to know. If the state breaks off they will
burrow at the edge, or fall. I thought of
them yesterday, and last night sang by the
fire, thinking of them.

They are something of us, but I think better,
lost back there in our old brown car.

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Time

The years to come (empty boxcars
waiting on a siding while someone forgets
and the tall grass tickles their bellies)
will sometime stay, rusted still;
and a little boy who clambers up,
saved by his bare feet, will run
along the top, jump to the last car,
and gaze down at the end into that river
near every town.
Once when I was a boy

I took that kind of walk,
beyond the last houses, out where the grass
lived, then the tired siding where trains whistled.
The river was choked with old Chevies and Fords.
And that was the day the world ended.

On a Misty Morning

Men who dream the world,
women who dream them,
and their children in their homes
whose thought has little hands

All are dreamed by day
or wakened into night
where trees lean early and rise late
edging the pearly sky,

Till the world, our common dream,
the sky, our only sound,
embrace the zeros of the dead—
one here, one there—gone.

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HERBERT MORRIS

The Treason of the Clerks Takes Many Forms

All day, perched on high stools, they tallied numbers
that bore no small resemblance to their lives.
All day, and year to year, they peered, they summed,
and something in the clock tooled their reduction.

All day they seemed exemplars of compliance.
All day pale figures issued from their pens.
The attics creaked, the water-spouts ran rusty,
and rain would seep like acid in the street.

All day the overseer lashed their backs
with scowls like cuts and scrutinies like salt.
But there were freezes faces might resort to,
havens the bones could posit, grins like refuge.

All day some Middle Europe of the mind
possessed them, leaked into the ink-pots, doubled
what darkness doomed the sashes, the disdain
of the dim overseer in his frock-coat.

All day the cold besieged the Gothic angles
and something in the blood too bleak too thin
could, at best, muster nothing in rebuttal.
Words choked within the throat, the mouth poured ashes.

But what the overseer could not know,
the gutter-spouts, the light that ate the stones,
was that the darkness, intimate and fleet,
released them to themselves, yielded the other.

*

In the night, after they replaced each ledger
on the high shelf, scrubbed at their fingers, after
partaking, near the grate, of musty suppers,
shriveled fruit picked at by the blind street-vendor,

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their dank and rancid woolens were transformed
to something greenly flowing, nearly silken.
Their hands, no longer cramped, sullied with ink-dye,
opened like flowers, breathed and beat like wings.

And the night was given to deeper things,
to darker things, to forces that, like music,
structured the universe in affirmations
of the intensest kind until the morning.

Where they would walk or lie, and where their bodies
knew as if for the first time, night to night,
what the body was made for, that the mouth
was human and a mouth, articulation

broke out like light in the most alien corners,
after that could not hope to be contained.
Their faces seemed, at last, redeemed as faces;
their lives gained all the meanings of a life.

By daybreak every dampness infiltrated,
great bone-chill drew its stores and settled in.
All odor of the field, all hint of wildness,
now was turned back, plowed under, burned, annulled.

They groped through certain foul, corrosive lanes
and gripped the rain's raw anguish in their teeth.
They found the door, climbed stairs, lit a poor fire.
Closer they drew their coats, to no avail.

Over their desks they bent their heads and summed.
The water in their hair defaced the sheets.
The overseer lashed, resumed the war.
The gutter-spouts streamed poisons, as before.

All day they seemed the model attic scribblers.
All day they tasted ash and reeked of dread.
The body knows deceptions long and lucid.
The night is deeper than the dead are dead.

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DOROTHY ROBERTS

At Dawn

Wild spray of stars blown half away as light
Rises on wind and icy grass sharp sprinkled
With gusts of torn leaves floors the world again.

I leave my bed and wrap them in my mind,
Warm them and make them real and make them one;
These visitors I reach beyond the window
Have this one home.

Here I am less than blown leaf, branch and star
But that in senses reaching wide I hold
Nature that changes ways at this one window
Enough to fill a world.

Under the Fir

Here on the fringe the fern comes, airiness,
And further in six mushrooms
Thumb up a simple existence of stem and spore.
Here needles have fallen and sunlight is in flecks
And emerald moss employs the magic circle.

Lives that might never have opened
Tranquil and bright, innocents bunched,
A wandering green lily,
A nest of violets reaching out to drink,
All shine in appreciation of the circle,
The space, the haven where the grass breaks vaguely
Upon the line of shade.

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PHILIP BOOTH

The Man on the Wharf

The man on the wharf, watching a man
shuck clams on the wharf, stands into

the wind as if he hung on a mooring.
Rolling drunk, his sea-legs are stable:

he watches the boats go out and come in.
He casts off himself when they sail;

when they harbor they harbor toward him.
Wherever they sail or haul herring,

the man on the wharf has already been.
His fogged eye telescopes ports,

and multiples one clear woman.
Her breasts were islands to home on,

sea-marks off his home cove, until
last winter sank her. Skim-ice ate

at the wharf through March. Like cancer.
Or like a surgeon cutting through multiplication.

The man on the wharf cannot remember
which. Or why he stands into the wind,

watching a man shuck clams on the wharf,
watching as if his hand held the knife.

He watches himself watching, in mind
of his son who will not write him, cut

by the wind that quicks through his workshirt,
by sunlight glinting the waves like knives;

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he pisses behind the boatshed, warm
where his body performs its remaining function;

then sucks at his pint of Jim Beam, relieved.
Rolled back into the wind again,

he watches the man shuck clams on the wharf.
He's almost calm, who swallows no answer,

but questions in bourbon this seeming harbor,
this harbor where he has always lived.

Distilled by an Indian sun, its hill-
sides bourbon, its trees peeled to rust,

it leaves him no choice of winters, no
skipper whose last command he might balk at,

now that the fishboats have cast him off.
They harbor downwind, rolling drunkenly

toward him.
The sea is all he can ask.

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IRVING SINGER

Love in Ovid and Lucretius

LIVING SEVERAL GENERATIONS APART, these poets could be studied as the brief chronicle of early Roman civilization. That, however, is not the use to which I shall put them. Instead they interest me as men who idealize in the very process of trying to free themselves of idealization.[1] In principle at least, Ovid and Lucretius think of love as nothing but a shudder in the loins, a meaningless, basically physiological, disposition within a non-purposive universe. All creatures being subject to the merciless dictates of mechanical laws, human love could not really differ from what happens in lower organisms. Ovid and Lucretius analyze love as neither a search for transcendental goodness nor an encounter with virtue nor a mystical adventure beyond the ordinary world. For them it reduces to sexuality, as it would for any other animal, plus a few oddities that human nature contributes in deluding itself about its own uniqueness. Love as something inherently noble they ridicule and reject. That it should unite man with the ultimate order of things they consider absurd. Nor would they admit that their perspective itself creates new ideals of love. They see themselves as the poets of science and commonsense. How then can they be idealizing anything?

In citing laws of nature to prove that love is really sexuality, Ovid and Lucretius anticipate much in Freud. And possibly Freud had them in mind when he said: "The most striking distinction between the erotic life of antiquity and our own no doubt lies in the fact that the ancients laid the stress upon the instinct itself whereas we emphasize its object. The ancients glorified the instinct and were prepared on its account to honour even an inferior object; while we despise the instinctual activity in itself, and find excuses for it only in the merits of the object."[2] If by "the ancients"

[1] This essay is taken from a forthcoming book (*The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther*, Random House, 1966) largely devoted to the concept of idealization. Briefly, I use the term to refer to the making (and expressing) of ideals of love. Throughout the book, I try to show how this involves an imaginative process of bestowing value upon some aspect of human experience.

[2] *Three Essays on Sexuality, SE,* Vol. VII, p. 149 fn.

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Freud meant thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, he could not easily have said anything further from the truth. For them it was precisely the merits of the object that both elicited and justified love: the better the one, the truer the other; so that inferior objects could be honored *only* to the extent that they were meritorious. In a sense, the idealists did glorify erotic instincts. For in idealizing the category of desire and using the concept of Eros to explain the dynamism of everything that exists, they dignify the instinctual (as well as all other) strivings of man. But what *they* mean by Eros is far from being sexuality. If, however, "the ancients" to whom Freud refers are Ovid and Lucretius, his generalization seems more plausible. Like Freud himself, these poets are "realists" in approaching love as an effect of sexual instinct in its natural environment. All three condemn the idealists for believing that objective goodness structures the universe and thereby elicits love. They find the possibility of human happiness not in spiritual discipline but in the satisfying of ordinary, observable instincts and desires. And yet they also idealize, making new ideals about love in accordance with what matters most to them as realists.

For that reason, I find it very hard to credit the usual descriptions of love in the Roman poets. Speaking of Latin literature in general, one critic says: " 'The animal instinct between the sexes and its gratification'—at last an explanation of what the Romans usually meant by 'amor.' Of Platonic love, spiritual love, 'le flirt,' romantic love, they knew very little: love was for them almost entirely physical, a thing of the senses."[3] Yes and no. Ovid and Lucretius do reduce love to sexuality, but (to quote Freud again, adding my own emphasis): they "*glorified* the instinct." They speak poetically and philosophically, not in the manner of empirical scientists. They bestow importance upon various aspects of their own experience, interpreting both the attitude and the ideal of love accordingly. This is evident once we place them side by side; for they do not idealize in exactly the same way. Bestowing value differently, Ovid and Lucretius create quite dissimilar ideals. They both glorify the sexual instinct; but their glorifications are often not alike. How could they be, since even sexuality means something different to each of the poets? Is that the cause of their varying idealizations? Or is it possibly the result?

[3] F. A. Wright, *The Mirror of Venus*, (G. Routledge & Son, 1925), p. 27.

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Elsewhere I speak of Greek and Christian ideas as a source of Courtly Love, which applied them to a purely human context. In certain respects, Ovid and Lucretius do something comparable. Where the Greek idealists had distinguished between Heavenly and Earthly Aphrodite, the Roman poets try to show that all we know of heaven is here on earth. Ovid in particular humanizes Greek ideas about Eros, describing it as a search for satisfaction, as an empirical power that leads to consummation, and sometimes quite successfully. Lucretius is somewhat different, as we shall see, but Ovid inhabits the medieval world of Courtly Love almost as much as his own. As in the ancient world Eros soared upwards with the idealists and then returned to earth with the realists, so too were there two traditions of Courtly Love in twelfth-century France. The earlier one, represented by the troubadour poets of Provence, reveals the unmistakable influence of Moorish and Mediterranean neo-Platonism. Though erotic in sublimated ways, this tradition condemned adultery and emphasized the ideal benefits that accrue from the frustration of normal desires. The later development, mainly in northern France, believed in sexual completion as a part of Courtly Love, even at the expense of adultery, and possibly for the sake of it. In this later tradition Ovid was widely read and quoted. What he had done with the idealism of his own age obviously inspired the realists of the middle ages. Their problems were similar; and though Ovid lived in the first and not the twelfth century, he takes on greater stature if one sees him as the forerunner of medieval humanism.

What Ovid particularly contributes is the element of sexual realism the northern tradition required. The myth of Pygmalion and the image, which Ovid recounts in *Metamorphoses,* may even be taken to symbolize the transformation of Courtly Love. At the outset, Pygmalion (like some medieval anchorite) "lived alone without a mate/ and took no woman to his bed."[4] One day "with wondrous skill" (for he is an artist, like the troubadours, not a mystic who has renounced the world) he fashions an image of ivory. It is the image of a woman, but "of a form more perfect than ever nature could bestow." So too is polished ivory more perfect, less blemished, than any material in nature. If the Platonic

[4] *Metamorphoses* X, 245 ff. All translations from Latin by Richard A. Macksey.

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Forms existed, they would all be made of ivory. When Pygmalion falls in love with his creation, he adores it in the manner of the troubadours: "He addresses and embraces it. . . . He even fears that bruises may appear on the limbs that he has fondled" (X, 256-258). The southern tradition of Courtly Love permitted fondling, but from an ivory image one could not hope for more than that. Eventually Pygmalion prays to Venus for a beloved who can love him back, and it is this that takes him beyond the troubadours. He does not dare to ask that his ivory maid be rendered human; he only begs for a living woman who would resemble her. With the graciousness of a love deity, Venus bestows more than has been requested. She gives life to the statue; and we may imagine it stepping down from its pedestal to assume the reciprocal sexuality of a human being:

> She was indeed a living body; he felt
> The veins pulse beneath his thumb; and then
> Pygmalion lavished praise to Venus; and real lips
> Pressed his at last, while the maiden felt his kisses
> And blushed, raising her timid eyes at once
> Toward the light and toward her lover. . . . *(X, 289-294)*

How fine a touch to have the new-born woman raise her vision to the skies, the abode of Venus perhaps but also the symbol of expansive possibilities in nature. And how different is this embrace from that other one which ends the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. There the female is vile and the male a beautiful, innocent boy she covets. The nymph literally drags Hermaphroditus down, pulling him beneath the waves, into the depths of carnal intimacy where all is fluid. Like Circe in the *Odyssey*, who uses her sexual powers to change men into alien shapes, Salmacis violates Hermaphroditus by merging her body with his:

> . . . their two entwining bodies seemed to merge
> And their forms assumed a single body, even as
> When twigs are grafted from the parent stock. . . .
> *(IV, 373-376)*

Here the myth of Aristophanes[5] has been used against itself,

[5] In Plato's *Symposium* the playwright Aristophanes delivers a speech in which he depicts the origin of man out of spherically-shaped creatures who were split in half by the gods. Aristophanes describes love as the desire to merge with that other half, that other self *(alter ego)*, from which each of us has been separated.

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for the merged condition is clearly a degradation. Descending, the woman has gone too far. A nice balance is demanded by Ovid, as it was by the medieval writers who learned from him, and most of his investigations into love are devoted to detecting it. To say that Ovid is a mere sensualist, just a "clever dandy" as one critic puts it,[6] is to misconstrue the art he teaches. When he begins *The Art of Love* by saying that his book is for the man who needs instruction and that love must be guided by art, he speaks as a moralist. In accordance with his own teachings, he is also speaking lightly and with humor; but he is not feigning moral discourse while really doing something else, tickling our inclinations to pornography or giving us hints about indiscriminate seduction. I take it as highly relevant that after giving detailed advice to men in pursuit of women he offers similar, apparently treasonous, counsel to the women themselves. Roman that he is, Ovid sees warfare as the ruling theme in love: Cupid wounds the heart with burning arrows, women are described as birds to be snared, game to be hunted down, booty to be carried off in a general Sabine rape. With supreme impartiality, however, he freely arms the Amazons as well. He delights in the conquest of Venus over Mars, the masculine aggressor, the supreme warrior, and now a captive of love. Alluding to the same myth, Lucretius treats Venus as the peacefulness of nature into which war and conflict must eventually issue, an ally and a source of strength to be used against some future enemy. But for Ovid Venus is herself the antagonist of Mars, woman warring against the male and frequently triumphant. At the same time, Venus is also love; and Ovid equips the opposing sexes with the assurance that she would have it thus: "To arms then, stalwart ladies, and victory under Venus!" Apparently, the struggle must be equal, as in a game or sport in which the participants profit most from a balancing of forces. It is as if Ovid were anticipating the essay by William James entitled "The Moral Equivalent of War." To express human aggression in beneficial ways, James advocates the battles of football. Ovid recommends sexual love.

In befriending women and realistically accepting them as they are, Ovid brings us closer to the northern courtly tradition than

[6] A. R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours,* (J. H. Furst Co., 1946), p. 371.

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almost anyone else in antiquity. Together with his concern about reciprocity, there goes an obvious fondness for the female sex, even a playful and gallant submissiveness, as if he were a comic Tristan. In one of the poems collected as *The Loves* he says:

> If any man deems it base to be the slave of woman,
> Before that man's judgment I stand convicted base.
> I'll accept that court's indictment, if only I did not burn so!
> *(II, XVII, 1-3)*

Furthermore, in *The Art of Love* he insists upon excellence of character in the lover, even to the detriment of physical charms: "*Ut ameris, amabilis esto:* to be loved, be lovable. . . . Though you have all the looks that graced the sea nymphs/ Or charmed the Homeric heroes, still you'll find/ It always helps to add some grace of mind. . . ." (II, 109 ff.) The virtues of tactfulness and tolerance he stoutly commends. They largely interest him as equipment of the hunt, but at least he perceives that such traits are eminently desirable in a lover. It is because he sees love as a delicate thing that lives on courtesy and gentle feelings that Ovid puts marriage in a wholly different category. These are lines the courtly tradition must surely have memorized:

> Under their contract, husbands and wives may lacerate each other;
> This is their natural privilege and right to rail.
> So be it for wives: the dowry of your spouse is strife.
> But let your mistress hear only what she desires;
> You are not bound in one bed by legal ties, but entered
> More freely: love is your bond and deed; love lays down the law.
> Heap up the loving words, the praise, the courteous phrases;
> Words are the honey the lover gathers for her ear.
> *(II, 53-60)*

In everything he writes Ovid shows an interest in the artfulness of love; he *civilizes* the sexual relationship, adjusting it to individual needs and temperaments, refining it to the point of elegance and human dignity. This is quite remote from love as "the animal instinct between the sexes and its gratification."

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The courtliness of Ovid shows through more clearly when contrasted with the rough and primitive naturalism of Lucretius. Ovid's poem in praise of Venus is said to have been inspired by the dedicatory prayer to the goddess with which Lucretius begins *De Rerum Natura.* But how the two differ! Both poets worship Venus as the generative power within the universe; but they portray her in vastly different terms. For Lucretius she is an energy through which all living things come into being, a natural force more elemental than the wind or the rain, a ruthless mechanism that instills fierce longing in all species, throbbing passion that leads to wild and infinite growth, to the teeming forth of life in nature. "So throughout seas and uplands, rushing torrents, verdurous meadows and the leafy shelters of the birds, into the breasts of one and all you instill alluring love, so that with passionate longing they reproduce their several breeds." The goddess to whom Ovid addresses himself is much tamer than this. Ovidian Venus instructs all things in the arts of living, as if she were a larger Prometheus. She is the giver of intelligence and imagination, a deity of civilization, humanized to the point of being called a queen:

> Venus reigns as queen; to her alone belongs
> The sovereign laws of sky and earth and waves.
> To her the gods can trace their generation,
> As we can count her verdant fertile gifts.
> She it was who filled the woods and fields;
> She it was who taught the world to love. . . .
>
> The ram is fierce in crossing horns with rams,
> But gently courts the amorous brow of his ewe;
> The fearsome bull who ravages the countryside
> Is hardly more than sheepish to the heifer;
> While in tumultuous seas the same rich force
> Drives fish that swim with Venus' tide.
>
> That force first lifted man from savage garb;
> From her he learned to dress and care for self.
> A lover was the first, they say, to sing

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By night to the maid who barred his way.
Eloquence was born to win that girlish heart:
Each man then sang his own poetic suit.

This goddess has been the mother of a thousand arts;
The wish to please has spawned a host of skills.
Can any man deny the April honor due to Venus:
Such blasphemy is far from *my* intention.
Besides, while everywhere the goddess reigns
And worshippers throng her temples, we Romans lead the way. . . . *(Fasti IV, 91-102)*

Lucretius had also dedicated his lines to Venus in the hope that she would lend him eloquence. And possibly he merits her support more than Ovid does. Ovid demonstrates allegiance to Venus by dallying with all the ladies in her court. But Lucretius loves no one but the goddess. In him the love of Venus, which is to say, the generative principle she personifies, is total and exclusive. His devotion is really religious love. It is what Plotinus or Augustine might have felt if they had been materialists in philosophy rather than Platonists. Within his own tradition Lucretius reminds one of Empedocles, whose cosmic Love and Strife he translates into Venus and Mars. As in Empedocles, the two operate in perfect unison with each other: the one creating, the other destroying, both together in a single, harmonious rhythm. Empedocles thought that Love combines the like with the unlike, whereas Strife repels them. Sexuality would, therefore, be Love's attempt to merge the opposing male and female into a positive oneness. But this could never succeed: Love must always be countered by the correlative Strife, which separates the unlike beings and causes them to hate one another. Love and hatred were thus part of the same condition, as in the famous lines of Catullus: "I hate and love, nor can the reason tell:/ But that I love and hate I know too well." In following Empedocles, Lucretius sees no possibility of love without strife, or creation without destruction. Worshipping Venus, he worships both principles at once. In their unitary structure, they constitute a single world-order and underlie the mechanical nature of everything. Indeed, they *are* that mechanism. Lucretius would not worship them otherwise.

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Venus being a generative force within a materialistic universe, Lucretius has little difficulty reducing human love to the mechanics of sexual impulse. In Book IV of *De Rerum Natura* he describes all love as an effect of sensation, itself liable to physical analysis. At the appropriate time in its physiological development, the human organism manufactures the germs of reproduction. According to Lucretius, there is only one stimulus capable of evoking a man's seed; and that is the human form or figure. Nor can the body resist movement in the direction from which it has been stimulated. As if he were explaining a scientific principle, Lucretius compares the ejaculation of seed to the spurting of blood towards the source of a wound:

> So too with a man who takes a blow from the arsenal of Venus,
> Whether the dart be launched by a boy with girlish limbs
> Or by a woman breathing love from all her body,
> The wounded man falls toward the source of his wound and seeks
> Union with it, yearning to spill his fluid from body to body.
> *(IV, 1052 ff.)*

A new variation this, though possibly the oldest, on the myth of Aristophanes. As a matter of fact, in returning to Empedocles, Lucretius may be closer to the beginnings of the myth than Plato himself. Describing the creation of man through the joint functioning of Love and Strife, Empedocles says:

> Many foreheads without necks sprang forth, arms wandered bereft of shoulders, eyes strayed alone, lacking brows. . . . As the two (opposite) divine forces clashed more extensively, these things fell together as they came upon each other . . . creatures were produced facing both ways, with double face and breast. . . .[7]

In Lucretius, too, love produces double creatures and would seem to desire merely the uniting of body to body. But even the historical (and certainly the Platonized) Aristophanes would have been shocked at the idea that no other kind of union enters into love. To sweeten the absurdity, Lucretius goes on to qualify his analysis. It sometimes happens, he tells us, that the organism has no means of venting its reproductive seed. In that event, erotic

[7] Quoted in Giorgio de Santillana, *The Origins of Scientific Thought,* (Mentor, 1961), p. 111.

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images arise and often linger painfully. At length they drive a man into the state of passionate desire. Human love is thus a combination of sexual impulse and erotic imagery, the latter caused by mechanical frustration. Images being themselves mere emanations of matter, Lucretius feels that he has defined love without any idealistic nonsense. Poet though he is, he speaks as if all scientists, all realists, all men of good sense would agree that there is nothing else to the phenomenon. No need to assume a oneness of lovers' souls or a mutual search for the Good. No need to talk about the response to another person, or the refinement of sensuous feeling. In his oddly archaic way, Lucretius is too "modern" for all that.

Given this approach to love, it is not surprising that Lucretius extols married life and condemns the "grand passions"—just the reverse of Ovid. The truth is that the pantheon of Lucretius houses more than just the unified deity Venus-Mars. He worships order in the universe at least as much as the generative principle. His religious love he extends to these two deities, as Empedocles had also done. They do not conflict, but like the figure of Janus they face in opposite directions: the one towards organized society, the other towards rampant nature. In his devotion to abstract Venus, Lucretius ignores individual human relations because he knows that the reproductive seed can vent itself equally well in any number of bodily objects. All cats being dark in the night of passion, all human bodies being more or less alike, why bother to discriminate? At the same time, sexual activity must be controlled, even systematized—not regulated by an art, but organized by social practice. Since they result from a thwarting of the generative principle, sexual images must be eliminated as quickly as they arise. But this must be done in an *orderly* fashion. It is a question of administration, and Lucretius discusses different possibilities. He sees the utility in promiscuous attachments, and recommends them for those who fall in love with an unattainable object. But promiscuity is haphazard, nowhere as effective as the institution that Lucretius really believes in: matrimony.

Like cynics throughout the ages, but without their frivolity, Lucretius advocates marriage as the cure for love. In married life

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those harmful erotic images can hardly arise. Marriage is regular and routine, an orderly social method for serving Venus by ejaculating seed in a fertile direction whenever the need proclaims itself. Indeed, as long as one satisfies both nature and society, Lucretius seems indifferent to all questions about the object of choice. Unlike Ovid, he offers no advice to those who seek a suitable mate. Married love depending upon the compatibility of sexual bodies, Lucretius simply reminds men that women enjoy intercourse as much as they do, tells women to keep themselves fresh if they want a man to share his life with them, and briefly concludes that a good marriage is built up by "mere usage"—bit by bit. In a sentence that must have amused Ovid, he describes the power and permanence of married love as if it were just an unbreakable habit or a trope in nature:

> For however light the blow, that which is repeatedly struck
> In the long run yields to the impact and lies ready to succumb.
> Don't you see that even drops of water falling on a stone
> In the long run wear and beat a way through that stone?
> *(IV, 1284-1287)*

In recommending therapeutic marriage, Lucretius condemns all love based on imaginative bestowals.[8] He sees them as an effect of mental disorder, a madness caused by erotic privation. He obviously believes that no lover who was sexually satisfied would assign to his beloved perfections that she does not have. Freud was later to say something very similar. For Lucretius it follows that love must be of two sorts. Either the lover aims for the normal and healthy goal of instinctual gratification, or else he submits to a senseless passion and wildly deranges himself pursuing illusory images. It is because he worships order as well as Venus that Lucretius finds the mad type of love so revolting. It does not lead to a transferral of seed, and it always causes irrationality in the lover.

[8] In *The Devil's Dictionary* Ambrose Bierce offers the following definition: "*Love,* n. A temporary insanity curable by marriage or by removal of the patient from the influence under which he incurred the disorder. This disease, like *caries* and many other ailments, is prevalent only among civilized races living under artificial conditions; barbarous nations breathing pure air and eating simple food enjoy immunity from its ravages. It is sometimes fatal, but more frequently to the physician than to the patient."

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The orderly mind perceives things as they are and takes its pleasures sensibly; but the passionate lover, corrupted by his own frustrations, deludes himself into seeing a woman not as she is but as he would like her to be. In depicting the falsifications of love, Lucretius takes them as virtually an insult to the rational principles that his philosophy deifies:

> A swarthy girl is hailed a 'nut-brown maid'; and even
> A slattern ranks as 'sweet disorder'; a cat-eyed wench
> Is a 'latter-day Pallas,' while if she's all sinew and bone,
> Call her a 'gazelle'; a sawed-off runt, 'my little Grace,'
> 'Wit's tiny looking-glass'; a lumbering virago, 'a miracle
> Of nature divinely cast'; if she's tongue-tied, 'a charming lisp';
> Struck dumb, it's 'modesty'; scolding and vicious chattering
> Become 'the torch of eloquence'; a girl too skinny
> To live is, of course, 'fashionably svelte'; half-dead
> With consumption? She's 'delicate.' Bloated, with cow-like
> Udders? She's 'Ceres herself, nursing the infant Bacchus.'
> The pug-nosed girl is 'faun-like' or 'child of the Satyrs';
> And a blubber-lipped floosie is 'an embodied kiss.'
>
> *(IV, 1160-1169)*

Enough! Enough! we say. But Lucretius informs us, coolly and with scorn, that he could go on much longer. He ends the catalogue only because it would be too tiresome to give all the terrible details. How different is Molière's version of this paragraph. Molière, who had studied Lucretius under Gassendi and even translated him, gives the following lines to the rational Eliante in *The Misanthrope:*

> Love, as a rule, affects men otherwise,
> And lovers rarely love to criticize.
> They see their lady as a charming blur.
> And find all things commendable in her.
> If she has any blemish, fault, or shame,
> They will redeem it by a pleasing name.
> The pale-faced lady's lily-white, perforce;
> The swarthy one's a sweet brunette, of course;
> The spindly lady has a slender grace;
> The fat one has a most majestic pace;

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The plain one, with her dress in disarray,
They classify as *beauté negligée;*
The hulking one's a goddess in their eyes,
The dwarf, a concentrate of Paradise;
The haughty lady has a noble mind;
The mean one's witty and the dull one's kind;
The mute one has a virtuous reserve.
So lovers manage, in their passion's cause,
To love their ladies even for their flaws.[9]

Molière has softened the attack. Unlike Lucretius he is not condemning love as mental disorder. If anything, he is praising it as a kind of simple courtesy. He does not say that lovers delude themselves, but only that they *speak* as if faults were perfections. The entire passage is designed to support Célimène's complaint against Alceste's offensive honesty. If he truly loved her, both she and Eliante are saying, he would accept her shortcomings and even find a way of glorifying them. To Alceste as well as Lucretius, this may sound like a plea for madness; but Molière does not present it as such. In fact, within the structure of the play, Eliante's speech is reminiscent of something that could have come from Ovid. For he encourages lovers to say the most extraordinary things, anything at all that will give the beloved pleasure. Although in one place he names "Folly, Illusion, and Madness" as the camp-followers of Cupid, Ovid hardly worries about the falsifications of love. He sees the utility in distorting facts, and feels no scruples about doing so:

Do not blame a girl for defects of mind or body:
Who's to gain by that? Better talk them away. . . .
Words have a magic power to temper nature's failings:
If she is blacker than pitch, 'tanned' is the word to invoke.
Cross-eyed? She has a 'Paphian gaze.' Albino? 'Fair Minerva.'
Skin and bones? 'What willowy grace invests her charm.'
If she's stunted, call her *petite;* if fat, every inch a woman!
A ready mind can manufacture grace from its opposite.[10]

But all this, which to Ovid and Molière is a laughing matter, Lucretius feels as something deadly serious and simply horrible.

[9] Act II, Scene 5. Translated by Richard Wilbur, (Harcourt, Brace, 1955), pp. 58-9.
[10] *Ars amatoria* II, 641-648.

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According to a legend Tennyson used, Lucretius committed suicide after being driven mad by a love philtre. Be that as it may, he appears more sensitive to the penalties of passion than almost anyone prior to Marcel Proust. Propertius, like any number of ancient poets and philosophers, may have said "Shun this hell"; but Lucretius really knows the domain. All love other than the strictly sexual is, for him, an agony and a deep distress. How else could one experience anything so unreal, unnatural, anything so disordered and irrational? Like Proust, Lucretius is particularly shocked by the sadism in lovers' passion:

> They clasp the desired object tight enough to hurt,
> And often fasten teeth on lips, crushing mouth on mouth.
> And all because this pleasure is not unmixed; beneath
> It lie secret goads inciting them to hurt the very
> Thing, whatever it may be, from which this frenzy grows.
> *(IV, 1079-1083)*

When he goes on to describe the aetiology of passional madness, Lucretius further anticipates Proust. He says that Venus will permit only a single type of reciprocity between the sexes: the sharing of mere sensual pleasure. Once people fall in love, however, they seek a greater reciprocity, a contentment or satisfaction in one another which their relationship itself makes impossible. Lovers delude themselves with "the hope that the flame of passion may be quenched by the same body that kindled it." For Lucretius—as for Proust—this is the worst, the cruelest, of love's deceptions. Though other appetites may be quieted, sexual passion is by its very nature insatiable. Food and drink being material substances actually taken in by the body, one may readily appease hunger or thirst. But not so passion. It is aroused by insubstantial images, and they can never be possessed with any degree of satisfaction. Love-making is an "act of physical possession in which, paradoxically, the possessor possesses nothing." Those words were written by Proust, but Lucretius could easily have said the same. He pictures Venus teasing lovers with erotic images that cause them to stare hopelessly at one another, or to stroke each other's body, even to entwine their limbs and embrace frantically in sexual intercourse. But all in vain: ". . . No one can devour the body/ Of another nor penetrate and be absorbed therein,/ Though cer-

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tainly this is what they sometimes seem to crave. . . ."(IV, 1110-1113) In other words, the Aristophanic merging is impossible even on the bodily level. Tortured by the painful images of pleasure, lovers can only destroy themselves—both morally and physically—unless they succeed in curing their disease through marriage or promiscuity.

To help free the unfortunates, Lucretius marshals the powers of orderly reason. Instead of deluding oneself about the beloved, one must achieve exact awareness of her imperfections, crediting her with nothing she does not strictly deserve. And even if she were as attractive as anyone could wish, she is just a human being, one among many creatures in nature: "To be sure, there are others; to be sure, we've survived so far without her;/ To be sure, she's physically no different, as we know, from the ugliest member of her sex. . . ." (IV, 1173-1174) Even so, we might add, does Shakespeare's Benedick speak before he learns how to love: "One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well"; or Ferdinand in *The Tempest,* who says: "for several virtues/ Have I liked several women; never any/ With so full soul, but some defect in her/ Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed/ And put it to the foil." But Lucretius goes even further. He ends the diatribe with a graphic vignette:

> She drenches herself, poor woman, in clouds of cheap perfume,
> Which moves her maids to give her a wide berth and giggle
> Behind her back. Still, her excluded lover, in tears,
> Often covers the threshold with mounds of flowers and wreaths,
> Anointing the haughty doorposts with aromatic herbs;
> And the poor fellow even plants love-sick kisses on the door.
> But were he at last to be let in, one whiff as he entered
> Would drive him to seek some decent excuse to take his leave.
> There would be a prompt end to his oft-rehearsed complaint,
> So deeply felt, and he would call himself a fool
> To have endowed her with qualities beyond mortal perfection.
> *(IV, 1175-1185)*

The scene is familiar to us from the writings of many a modern realist. It is virtually translated (and put to the same use) by Jonathan Swift, who elsewhere defines love as "a ridiculous pas-

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sion which hath no being but in play-books and romances." All such deflationary wit has its literary source in Lucretius.[11]

As with most realists, it is sheer compassion for the sufferings of others that makes Lucretius want to liberate the ensnared lovers. He is like those sympathetic gods who beg Vulcan to remove the net in which he has caught Mars and Venus. In the myth Vulcan is the outraged husband, but also the principle of order—dull in comparison to the adventuresome Mars, somewhat ineffectual, yet steady and productive like the law of cause and effect. But if Venus deceives him so readily, how stable can their union be? In referring to the pantheon of Lucretius, I said that its two deities did not conflict. Perhaps that was an overstatement. Lucretius bids us to propitiate Venus as the deepest force in nature, and so as the ultimate goddess in the order of things. In worshipping Venus, we manifest a love of order. And yet, Venus is by nature *dis*orderly. She brings the net upon herself by playing Vulcan false; and then —for no apparent reason—she casts it upon those lovers whom she teases with erotic images. How can the rational man, the realistic philosopher, the quasi-scientific poet, give his undivided heart to her?

He cannot; nor does Lucretius, regardless of what he pretends. He may assiduously devote himself to Venus; but one always detects a shudder of revulsion, as if his adoration contained more fear and awe than love. Within the history of naturalistic philosophy, he reminds one of Schopenhauer saying no to the blind will of nature at the same time as he knows that he must submit to it. Lucretius says yes to Venus, but woefully and with half a heart. In accepting her simply as the mechanical device for propagating a species, he rejects all the wile and artifice of the goddess. He knows it is she who instills the maddening emotions of love—that excitement which is not purely pleasurable and that illusory hope of merging. This much of Venus he will not worship. What he reveres is not even sexual desire: at least, not the experience of sex or the delights of instinctual gratification. It is mere *fertility* that Lucretius idealizes. As if he were a more philosophical Hesiod, he subsumes all life under the aspect of husbandry. The Venus in his pantheon is a category of biology—like natural selection to a Darwinian. Better yet, a super-biology; for the ma-

[11] Cf. "Love's Melancholy—Artificial Allurements," in Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part III, Section 2, Member 2, Subsections 3-4.

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terialism of Lucretius is just as cosmic as the spiritualism of Plotinus. Lucretius idealizes the universal fact of pulsating energy, as if nothing else in nature really mattered. Perhaps that is why he leads into his discussion of love by talking about sexual ejaculations during sleep, just as Proust was later to begin his own investigations with the erotic dreams of a growing boy. According to Lucretius, the data of consciousness are all epiphenomenal. Santayana praises him for writing "the poetry of things themselves." And well Santayana might. For in Lucretius one encounters the clearest idealization of that "realm of matter" on which so much of Santayana's philosophy is based.

But even Santayana recognizes that a love of matter is not the same as a love of life. Discussing Lucretius' arguments against fearing death, he rightly points out their futility: "What is dreaded is the defeat of a present will directed upon life and its various undertakings. Such a present will cannot be argued away, but it may be weakened by contradictions arising within it, by the irony of experience, or by ascetic discipline."[12] Santayana concludes that Lucretius helps us to overcome the fear of death by weakening the will and so leading it into a surrender of life. But possibly one can go further. Lucretius considers the fear of death irrational because he does not *know* what it is to love life. He idealizes matter as a way of *escaping* those individual and social experiences that make up the life of human beings. In this, too, he may resemble Plotinus more than one originally suspects. Lovers cannot fuse their bodies, but Lucretius seems to crave a merging with all of matter. And what is that but a wish for self-annihilation? Having started with the fact of vital sexuality, Lucretius ends up with an antithetical love of death. Is this the import of his legendary suicide?

*

How different are the idealizations of Ovid! How facile are those scholars who classify him with Lucretius because both think of love as sexuality. For Ovid sex is always a gratuitous pleasure, a consummation cultivated by art and based on principles of taste or refinement. Without denying the biological function and material meaning of sexual desire, Ovid bestows importance only on the

[12] "Three Philosophical Poets," in my edition of Santayana's *Essays in Literary Criticism* (Scribner's, 1956), p. 25.

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sport itself. He idealizes a highly ceremonial, and even pompous, game: an empire has arisen where once there was only a republic. All men and women participate in the regal sport, though only an *aficionado* like Ovid understands the rules, the prizes, and the subtle manoeuvers of the expert players. Surely this is but a meager part of love; but at least Ovid removes sexuality from the brutish realm of matter. The game he idealizes is an aesthetic activity: it is the dance of life, a merry-go-round in which the gods and goddesses pursue each other with mindless abandon, a gay titillation of hide-and-seek, a shifting kaleidoscope in which the partners change places from episode to episode (hence the theme of transformation, metamorphosis). Nor is it all delectation in this game of musical couches and antic hay. The sport can be as deadly as a bull fight; at any moment, Venus may turn into Diana, the arrows of Cupid drawing fatal blood, the pursuit becoming a murderous hunt, and even the hunter shot down as prey (as in the myth of Actaeon). But the sadness is always delicate, lightly etched and almost saccharine; and anyhow nothing painful lasts for very long in the world of Ovid's idealization. Everything is on the move, like those nymphs and satyrs endlessly tripping round a Grecian vase, or the skipping figures in Botticelli's *Primavera,* or all the pastel country-folk stealing kisses from one another in paintings by Watteau or Boucher. What Ovid idealizes is not the instinct but the innocent merriment of sex, the sylvan loveliness of pursuit and sweet surrender.

All is not beautiful in Ovid; but in his verse Venus rises from a half-shell and graciously floats into a sunlit atmosphere. We seem to have drifted above the world of Lucretius—that mineral earth where only matter exists, where the stones of Deucalion have not yet become men and women. Were there ever two poets more unlike? Ovid and Lucretius both discuss the comparative merits of different positions in sexual intercourse; but, characteristically, Lucretius cares only about facilitating procreation, and Ovid only about the pleasures of sight and touch. Even the sadism that horrifies Lucretius is for Ovid just the rough and tumble of a physical sport. His humane art, designed to minimize the pain and maximize the pleasure, encourages lovers to accept the ground-rules of Venus: "It's a convention, no more, that man is cast in the role of pursuer;/ Women don't chase us; mousetraps don't run after

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mice."[13] That this should be a convention, rather than a frightening deception as Lucretius would say, transforms the entire character of Venus. Ovid can rightly call her "queen" because she establishes a benign harmony between the warring sexes. Far from needing to be checked by some external order, she is herself the inner equilibrium of successful love-making. In this sense, Ovid is more fully devoted to her than is Lucretius. Even when he warns against the dangers of love and proposes remedies for those who have been deranged by it, Ovid remains true to Venus after his fashion. We are not to stop playing the game; we are to learn how to play it better. Ovid directs his therapeutic advice towards lovers who suffer needlessly, or in a particular relationship that has lost its hedonic potential. He does not try to cure love through marriage or sheer promiscuity, as Lucretius does, but only through a new encounter with a new beloved under new and more promising circumstances. Although Ovid does prescribe measures that reverse the progress of love in the old relationship, his treatment is really homeopathic. A fresh affair replaces the weary one, as in the words of Cicero "one nail drives out another"; but the need to cultivate the art of love remains constant.

These differences between Ovid and Lucretius appear most sharply in the question of self-delusion. To undo the damages of love, both poets create what may be called a counter-idealization. For *his* method of disintoxicating lovers Lucretius invokes nothing but cold, hard reason itself. We are to free ourselves of passion by learning how to see the woman as she really is. We must realize that no mortal is perfect, that virtues are not unique to any one person, and that every female is just another human being in a world of material objects. Ovid's counter-idealization is less rationalistic, and deeper in its psychological awareness. Like Lucretius Ovid advises us to concentrate upon the woman's faults, to remind ourselves of her wanton behavior, to itemize what she has cost us, etc. But also he calls upon the imagination in ways that parallel the original bestowals. And as these were formerly used to delude the beloved (for the sake of pleasing and to get what the lover wants), their contraries now help us to deceive *ourselves*:

> So wherever you can, fool yourself, her attractions misprize;
> Just tip the scales a little and criticize.

[13] *Ars amatoria* I, 275-6.

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If generously plump, call her fat; if dark, black as pitch;
If slender, of course, a skinny old bitch;
If she's clever, she's brazen and sharp;
If she's simple and good, she has the mind of a carp.[14]

And so on, as Ovid fights fire with fire. Unlike Lucretius he has no doctrinal bias against erotic images and would never think of blaming them for the ravages of love. By quickly propitiating Venus in the mechanical transferral of seed, Lucretius destroys the amorous imagination. But Ovid, like any other theorist in the arts, finds it indispensable. In turning it against a particular woman, he merely frees it to act more constructively with someone else. One could hardly think of Lucretius contributing to Courtly Love. Ovid does so not only in studying the intricacies of human relations and advocating equal rights for all contestants, but also in recognizing the agency of imagination—whether one is in love trying to get out or out trying to get in.

At the same time, Ovid as a whole is very foreign to the courtly tradition, the northern version as well as the troubadour. Where their ideals are noble and aspiring, his are modest, limited in scope. Chaucer says that "love is a serious enterprise"; but for Ovid all seriousness is a source of embarrassment. Though life would not be worth living without the flame of love, he wishes to moderate the heat, to turn the burner quite low, as low in fact as sexual excitement will permit. From the very outset, Ovid declares that the theme of his art is just "a little pleasant indulgence," and elsewhere that what he sings is merely "good sense." Nowhere do we find that lyrical surge of high importance, that claim to metaphysical justification, which Courtly Love shares with the rest of the idealistic tradition. If Ovid belongs to that tradition, as I have been suggesting that in part he does, it is only on the periphery and as an antidote to the hostile influence of a critic like Lucretius. And if by passion we mean that fever in the blood associated with the self-hypnosis of "falling in love," then Ovid fears it as much as Lucretius and almost everyone else in the ancient world. In the nineteenth century Romantic Love fuses the idealistic tradition with a realistic acceptance of sexual passion, making passionate experience itself the source, the vehicle, and even the goal of ideality in love. Courtly Love rarely idealizes passion in this way, but it

[14] *Remedia amoris* III, 323-328.

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resembles romanticism in giving value to human intimacy. Ovid differs from both. The sexuality that he idealizes is only emotional façade: nothing passionate, nothing cosmic, nothing deeply inspiring in sexual relations; nothing but a playfulness in the contact between two epidermises.

For the scholars are ultimately right about Ovid: he *is* a cynic and a clever dandy. Like most stock ideas in the history of literature, there is a level at which this one is undeniable. Urbane and cultured as he may be, Ovid continually nudges us in the ribs and admits to some motive which he himself considers unworthy. Women all being cheats, he condones cheating them as well; he crudely assumes that all appetites are as jaded as his own and that only forbidden fruit is tempting to anyone; he confesses that he himself can only love when some female has wronged him; he even states the premises of an implicit syllogism to the effect that "only base actions please, and every man serves his own pleasure"—from which it logically follows that all human actions are necessarily base. If *this* is the art of love, it amounts to little more than amoral seduction: pleasant indulgence and good sense perhaps, but only to a sense that wilfully refuses to consider the nature of goodness. Such a complaint could not be made against high-minded Lucretius. It can be made against Ovid.

From this point of view, Ovid's art would seem to have two objectives: first, the attaining of complete and harmonious sexual pleasure; second, the maintaining of supremacy within the relationship by means of deception and erotic trickery. The first objective involves the ideal of reciprocity, which Ovid enunciates in no uncertain terms: "Let the woman feel the act of love to her marrow; / Let both partners enjoy equal delights."[15] But though he believes in the sharing of pleasures, Ovid despairs of any other merging—indeed, of any other beneficial union. He consistently views the participants in love as selfish opponents, each jockeying for power over the other. His second objective does not bring the peace of mutual concern, that being impossible, but only coexistence. In his impartial manner he advises each side to feign a passion for the other while nevertheless retaining independence. Obviously, the goal is to get someone else to love you without your having to give love in return. Ovid teaches men how to disarm

[15] *Ars amatoria* III, 789-790.

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a woman by arousing in her a passion which is not really reciprocated. And then, with suicidal insistence, he tells women the secret of male psychology: all men want to *believe* that they are loved, regardless of the truth. Even in love-making, where Ovid appreciates the virtues of mutual enjoyment, he advises both lovers to pretend that they are feeling what the other expects of them. It never occurs to him that what I have called his first objective is possibly being undermined by the ruses of the second.

Perhaps it is this inner contradiction, this shallowness of moral insight, that makes Ovid's laugh sound hollow. A livelier, more lightfoot poet could hardly be found. Yet his verse is sad, even pathetic, like a wreath of faded vine-leaves. Though he teaches us to play the game of love, one feels that in this sport—as he describes it—there is no winning. Does Ovid realize this himself? Is that what he is telling us in the myth of Narcissus at the fountain? Narcissus is doomed to tragic failure from the start. Not only does he love an insubstantial image—as Lucretius would say—but also he chooses as his object a mere reflection of himself. In doing so, Narcissus creates the smallest of all closed societies and makes it impossible for his love to be reciprocated. But the Ovidian lovers are always in this condition: they *all* use the beloved as a way of loving themselves, and they all wish to be loved instead of loving someone else. That is why deluding them is both easy and necessary. Ovid may shrug his shoulders, thinking the condition is universal to man; but in fact it merely distinguishes his kind of person —the moral weakling and the libertine.

What Ovid idealizes is not the same as self-love in Aristotle or primal narcissism in Freud. In Aristotle and Freud the desire to be loved leads one to pursue social ideals. These make no sense to Ovid. He is too close to sheer eroticism for that. In loving themselves, his lovers pursue their own unhappy image, and even hunt it down like Humbert Humbert shooting Quilty in *Lolita*. They are in love with little more than their own sensations, as if at every moment they had to prove that they are feeling *something*. Freud speaks of the sensualist as one who cannot love others because really he does not love himself either. If this is right, as I assume it must be, Ovid's gay veneer is itself a deep deception, hiding perhaps a deeper fear—the fear of love. And behind that there may be another. In flitting from sensation to sensation, what is

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Ovid really afraid of? Is it possibly that merging with something else which Lucretius and Plotinus each desires, each in his own way? Ovid is not wrong to fear such merging; for life cannot comprehend it. But instead of conquering his fear, he turns away from its reality and hides his head in the froth of sensualism, just as Narcissus does.

Some of this Ovid also sees. He seems to know that without massive delusions his kind of love cannot exist, but that with them comes inevitable disaster. Speaking in the poet's voice, he says to Narcissus (as if addressing *mon frère, mon semblable*): "What you seek is nowhere; turn your head and you lose what you desire."[16] So too, the Ovidian lover enjoys love only in his fantasies, or else in writing about them. And as the failure of love is alienation instead of oneness—this myth being the myth of Aristophanes run backwards—Narcissus finally comes to hate himself, to wish that from himself he might escape. He does, as all men do, by dying; but in his death he automatically destroys the object of his love. Thus nothing survives his passion, nothing but the little flower into which he is transformed. And what are we to say of that metamorphosis? Is the flower a symbol of beauty rising from the dunghill of artistic egoism? A final tribute to the generative powers of Venus? Or just the incarnation of man's absurd hope that all the suffering of life will somehow issue into something good?

[16] *Metamorphoses* III, 433.

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PATRICIA MARX

Interview with Anne Sexton

MARX: I understand that you started writing poetry only in 1957. What made you begin at such a late date?

SEXTON: Well, it was actually personal experience, because I had had a nervous breakdown, and as I was recovering I started to write, and I got more and more serious about it, and I started out writing almost a poem a day. It was a kind of rebirth at 29.

MARX: What do you think caused you to write poetry after a breakdown? What was the impetus?

SEXTON: It's too strange. It's just a matter of coincidence. I think probably I'm an artist at heart, and I've found my own form, which I think is poetry. I was looking at educational television in Boston, and I. A. Richards was explaining the form of a sonnet, and I thought, "Well, so that's a sonnet." Although I had learned it in high school, I hadn't ever done anything about it. And so I thought, "I'll try that, too. I think maybe I could." So I sat down and wrote in the form of the sonnet. I was so pleased with myself that for about three months I wrote a sonnet every day. There are no sonnets in my book. They have since been discarded. But that's the way I started.

MARX: When did you start taking yourself seriously as a poet?

SEXTON: I think when I was published. After I'd been writing about a year and a half I started sending things to magazines, and collecting rejection slips. I wasted a lot of time on it. There were kind of two sides of me. One part was writing poems very seriously and the other was running this little fool's business, which meant I will send out my poems today to four magazines, and the mail will bring five or six poems back.

MARX: You often mention your experience in an asylum where you wrote poetry. Did you write when you were very disturbed, or afterwards? Did you find writing had a beneficial effect on your health?

SEXTON: I don't think so particularly. It certainly did not create mental health. It isn't as simple as my poetry makes it, because I simplified everything to make it more dramatic. I have writ-

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ten poems in a mental institution, but only later, not at the beginning.

MARX: There is a popular notion that creative genius is very close to insanity. Many of our major poets now, such as Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke before he died, often had mental breakdowns. Do you feel there's truth in this notion?

SEXTON: Well, their genius is more important than their disease. I think there are so many people who are mentally disturbed who are not writers, or artists, or painters or whatever, that I don't think genius and insanity grow in the same bed. I think the artist must have a heightened awareness. It is only seldom this sprouts from mental illness alone. However, there *is* this great feeling of heightened awareness that all artists must have.

MARX: In your book, *All My Pretty Ones,* you quote this part of a letter written by Franz Kafka: "The books we need are the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves. A book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us." Is this the purpose you want your poetry to serve?

SEXTON: Absolutely. I feel it should do that. I think it should be a shock to the senses. It should almost hurt.

MARX: Do you find that all poetry does this when you read it? Do you admire certain poetry more for doing this?

SEXTON: No, not necessarily. I think it's just my little declaration to myself. I put it in the book to show the reader what I felt, but Kafka's work certainly works upon me as an axe upon a frozen sea. But I admire many poets, many writers who don't do this.

MARX: I wonder if you would further explain that metaphor.

SEXTON: I see it very literally as an axe, cutting right through a slab of ice. I think we go along very complacently and are brainwashed with all kinds of pablum, advertisements every minute, the sameness of supermarkets, everything—it's not only the modern world, even trees become trite—and we need something to shock us, to make us become more aware. It doesn't need to happen in such a shocking way, perhaps, as in my poetry. I think of the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, which seems to have beautiful ordered clarity. Her fish hurts as much as Randall Jarrell's speaking people. They are two of my fa-

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vorite poets. Their work shocks me into being more alive, and that's maybe what I mean. The poet doesn't have to use my method to have that happen to me. And Rilke, think of Rilke with his depth, his terrible pain!—

MARX: Do you find that the writing of poetry achieves this for you as well as the reading of it?

SEXTON: No, the writing actually puts things back in place. I mean, things are more chaotic, and if I can write a poem, I come into order again, and the world is again a little more sensible, and real. I'm more in touch with things.

MARX: How does a poem come into being?

SEXTON: Oh, that's a terrible question! I don't know. Sometimes you get a line, a phrase, sometimes you're crying, or it's the curve of a chair that hurts you and you don't know why, or sometimes you just want to write a poem, and you don't know what it's about. I will fool around on the typewriter. It might take me ten pages of nothing, of terrible writing, and then I'll get a line, and I'll think, "That's what I mean!" What you're doing is hunting for what you mean, what you're trying to say. You don't know when you start.

MARX: Do you work on it a long time?

SEXTON: I work on it a very long time. For one lyric poem I rewrote about 300 typewritten pages. Often I keep my worksheets, so that once in a while when I get depressed and think that I'll never write again, I can go back and see how that poem came into being. You watch the work and you watch the miracle. You have to look back at all those bad words, bad metaphors, everything started wrong, and then see how it came into being, the slow progress of it, because you're always fighting to find out what it is that you want to say. You have to go deeper and deeper each time. You wonder why you didn't drown at the time—deeper and deeper.

MARX: Is it a struggle or pleasure?

SEXTON: Oh, it's a wonderful pleasure. It's a struggle, but there's great happiness in working. As anyone knows, if you're doing something that you love and you're struggling with it, there's happiness there, particularly if you can get it in the end. And I'm pretty stubborn. I need to keep after it, until I get it. Or I keep after it until I kill it.

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MARX: Do you discard many poems that you write?

SEXTON: Well, now I think I prediscard them. I don't write them, which is one reason why I write less than I did in the beginning. I wrote a lot of unimportant poems, and now when I look at a poem, I always wonder why was this written. There should be a reason for it. It should do something to me. It should move me. I have some poems that have haunted me for four or five years, and they're unfinished and maybe they'll never be finished. I know they're not right, but it hurts not to write them. I have this great need somehow to keep that time of my life, that feeling. I want to imprison it in a poem, to keep it. It's almost in a way like keeping a scrapbook to make life mean something as it goes by, to rescue it from chaos—to make "now" last.

MARX: In your first volume of poetry, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back,* you quote another passage from a letter, this time from Schopenhauer to Goethe, and it says, "It is the courage to make a clean breast of it in the face of every question that makes a philosopher." I take it that you mean this courage also makes a poet.

SEXTON: Yes, exactly. It's very hard to reveal yourself. Frankly, anything I say to you is useless and probably more deceiving than revealing. I tell so much truth in my poetry that I'm a fool if I say any more. To really get at the truth of something is the poem, not the poet.

MARX: Do you find that you are more truthful in your poetry than you are to yourself?

SEXTON: Yes, I think so. That's what I'm hunting for when I'm working away there in the poem. I'm hunting for the truth. It might be a kind of poetic truth, and not just a factual one, because behind everything that happens to you, every act, there is another truth, a secret life.

MARX: You wrote for the Poetry Book Society, "All poets lie. As I said once in a poem, a writer is essentially a crook. With used furniture he makes a tree." Now how do you reconcile that with your remark about poetry being the truth?

SEXTON: I think maybe it's an evasion of mine. It's a very easy thing to say, "All poets lie." It depends on what you want to call the truth, you see, and it's also a way of getting out of the literal fact of a poem. You can say there is truth in this, but it might

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not be the truth of my experience. Then again, if you say that you lie, you can get away with telling the awful truth. That's why it's an evasion. The poem counts for more than your life.

MARX: Do you find that you often distort the literal facts of your life to present the emotional truth that lies under them?

SEXTON: Well, I think this is necessary. It's something that an artist must do to make it clear and dramatic and to have the effect of the axe. To have that effect you must distort some of these facts to give them their own clarity. As an easy example, in my long poem to my daughter and about my mental illness, I don't imply that I was ever in an institution more than once, but that was the dramatic truth. The actual truth was something quite different. I returned quite a few times, and the fact that I have two children was not mentioned in this, because the dramatic point was I had one child, and was writing to her. It made it a better poem to distort it this way. I just don't mention it. So you don't have to include everything to tell the truth. You can exclude many things. You can even lie (one can confess and lie forever) as I did in the poem of the illegitimate child that the girl had to give up. It hadn't happened to me. It wasn't true, and yet it was indeed the truth.

MARX: Are you the ultimate judge of what the truth is?

SEXTON: No. There's the trouble. No, I'm not.

MARX: What is the criterion?

SEXTON: I don't think there is one. I mean, people lie to themselves so much—postmarks lie, even gravestones lie. The effort is to try to get to some form of integrity when you write a poem, some whole life lived, to try to present it now, to give the impact. It's the same as with a novelist, only it's in little sections.

MARX: Are you ever influenced, or do you ever learn anything from critics?

SEXTON: Oh, they're very disturbing. I don't know what I learn. I just want to say, "Gee whiz, kids, that's the best way I could do it," something like that. One prolific poet whom I greatly admire can hardly write a damning review without mentioning my name in connection with "mechanically bad writing." What should I do? Send him a telegram? I carried one very bad review in my wallet all over Europe. The good reviews I left at

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home. But even over there I was still Anne. I couldn't change her. I think mostly reviewers are upsetting. You just love the praise, and you try to shut out the criticism. I don't know how much they can influence you. I don't think they always read you correctly, but you always think the ones that like you are reading you pretty well.

MARX: Very few women have been great poets. Do you find that there's a difficulty in being a woman and a creative artist?

SEXTON: I think they are really very closely allied. I don't think it's that difficult at all. It's within a woman to create, to make order, to be an emotional, full human being, I think; perhaps men are better because they are denied this in their lives. Therefore they put more of it into a poem, and maybe if you are born with an extra amount, as a woman, it works out all right. You have enough for life itself, you have a family, and then you have some left over. It always seems to me I have too much left over. Maybe that's an ingredient.

MARX: In one of your poems, "The Black Art," you wrote, "A woman who writes feels too much those fancies and portents" and then in another stanza, "A man who writes knows too much of spells and fetishes." Do you think there is this distinction between the woman being the feeling creature and the man being the rational?

SEXTON: I don't think so, really. I think I was lying a little bit. It is in that same poem I said a writer is essentially a crook, and we're quite together in that, the male and female. I don't think that man is the rational being, and there are some marvelous women poets who are very rational: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop. May Swenson is a very good poet and certainly not over-emotional in any way. She knows just when to hold back and when to give forth. Then there are male poets who are so emotional that I don't think this holds true. Great poets know both.

MARX: You were mentioning that perhaps the reason that more men have been great poets is that they are denied the creativity that comes naturally to women, through having children. Do you think then that some kind of channeling or denial is important?

SEXTON: Well, it hasn't been for me. I think that it might be so.

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Sometimes I think, "Oh, I'm so lonely." This is the curse of being a writer or an artist, but then I think that great artists such as Rilke have treasured this, worshipped this. And then sometimes I think I'd give it all up if I could just be comfortable and with things. I think women are essentially *with* things. They're part of the earth, and perhaps it's my own peculiar trait that I feel not part of the earth. Therefore I look at it a little more sharply. I feel a little more outcast, and it perhaps makes me more of a writer.

MARX: That may be the dilemma of the modern woman, though—

SEXTON: Oh, I don't know! Poor modern woman!

MARX: What is your feeling about the "feminine mystique"? One is always hearing of the problems of modern woman. Do you think it's any worse now?

SEXTON: Maybe modern woman is more conscious now, more thinking. I can't tell. Sometimes I feel like another creature, hardly a woman, although I certainly am, in my life. I can't be a modern woman. I'm a Victorian teenager—at heart. I noticed in Europe that women are not complaining as much, and their lives are certainly not as good as ours. We have much more freedom, and we can speak up, and I like that. I like to speak up.

MARX: You mentioned before that as a writer you feel alone and not part of the earth.

SEXTON: It isn't as a writer. It's as a human being.

MARX: Do you feel you are associated with any other poets?

SEXTON: I am often likened to Robert Lowell or W. D. Snodgrass, and I think we all kind of got born into this about the same time, writing in a certain frank style. I do find that perhaps I'm drawn to women poets because some of them have some quality that I lack. I often find myself liking a poet, for example, May Swenson, or Elizabeth Bishop, who does something that I can't do at all, and I admire it for being so clear and true and having a beauty that doesn't seem to shine from my poetry at all. I don't feel as though I'm part of any group, because I'm too much off by myself, and not in the academic world, except that I did study with Robert Lowell for a while.

MARX: I wonder in what way you feel his poetry influenced your work?

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SEXTON: Actually, this is a terrible thing to admit, but I had not read any of his poetry when I studied with him. I did not go to college, and when I was studying with him I was so innocent as not to have read any of his poems, and his *Life Studies* had not come out at the time. They came out after I had finished studying with him. So they didn't influence me at all, because I hadn't seen them. If anything influenced me it was W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle.* I had written about half of my first book when I read that poem, and it moved me to such an extent—it's about a child, and he has to give up his child, which seems to be one of my themes, and I didn't have my own daughter at that time—that I ran up to my mother-in-law's where she was living and got her back. I could only keep her at that time for a week, but the poem moved me to *action.* It so changed me, and undoubtedly it must have influenced my own poetry. At the time everyone said, "You can't write this way. It's too personal; it's confessional; you can't write this, Anne," and everyone was discouraging me. But then I saw Snodgrass doing what I was doing, and it kind of gave me permission.

MARX: I wonder what is the relationship between form and making a poem function like an axe. In what way do you approach a poem stylistically and in what way does content dominate?

SEXTON: Content dominates, but style is the master. I think that's what makes a poet. The form is always important. To me there's something about fiction that is too large to hold. I can see a poem, even my long ones, as something you could hold, like a piece of something. It isn't that I care about the shape of it on the page, but the line must look right to me. About half of my poems are in some sort of form. The poems that aren't in form have a shape, just the same, even if it isn't a vase or anything that simple, but they have a kind of shape, a body of their own. There are some stories that are long and thin. They should be. There's a reason for it. I don't decide this. The story writes itself and must find its right form. I'm not talking about something that's particularly academic, or perhaps it is. It's just a little trick that I have of my own.

MARX: Do you mean by form just the physical look of the poem?

SEXTON: Yes, sometimes, but also the sound. But I think of it as something you can hold. I think of it with my hands to begin

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with. I don't know what the poem will be and I start out writing and it looks wrong. I start a long line and that looks wrong, and a short line, and I play around with rhyme, and then I sometimes make a kind of impossible syllabic count, and if I can get the first verse and it's right, then I might keep on with that for four more verses, and then I might change it because I felt that it needed a new rhythm. It has as much to do with speech as it does with the way it will look on the page, because it will change speech—it's a kind of compression. I used to describe it this way; that if you used form it was like letting a lot of wild animals out in the arena, but enclosing them in a cage, and you could let some extraordinary animals out if you had the right cage, and that cage would be form.

MARX: In the same article that you wrote for the Poetry Book Society you said, "Form for me is a trick to deceive myself, not you, but me."

SEXTON: I can explain that exactly. I think all form is a trick in order to get at the truth. Sometimes in my hardest poems, the ones that are difficult to write, I might make an impossible scheme, a syllabic count that is so involved, that it then allows me to be truthful. It works as a kind of super-ego. It says, "You may now face it, because it will be impossible ever to get out." Almost any accomplished poet can do this. The point is can you get to the real, the sharp edge of the poem? But you see how I say this not to deceive you, but to deceive me. I deceive myself, saying to myself you can't do it, and then if I can get it, then I have deceived myself, then I can change it and do what I want. I can even change and rearrange it so no one can see my trick. It won't change what's real. It's there on paper.

MARX: Do you really set the rules to begin with?

SEXTON: I don't set the rules. I don't sit down and say, "I'm going to have *a, b, c, d, e* and 14 syllables." I work and work for the first stanza, and if it looks right and if it feels right, then I cement it. I say, "Okay, here it is." I have done this with some poems. The syllabic count is this, the rhyme goes *a, b, c, a, b, c,* or however, and I follow that, and then after I've done it, and it's sometimes very hard, I may change it so that no one could look back over it and see that I had made this small conceit.

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Better to hide conceits like this and leave it raw. Take out rules and leave the instant.

MARX: And this works in your best poems?

SEXTON: Well, perhaps my hardest. I must say I don't do it as often now. In my newer poems I'm not using form half as much, and I don't know to what to attribute this. I don't know what it is.

MARX: By form then you really mean the physical shape of the poem and how it sounds?

SEXTON: And how it rhymes and the length of the lines. Sometimes a short line is a very sharp thing, and the breaking of a line, the breaking of the rhythm is a very important thing. I think of all these things quite magically, and not in some academic way, because I don't really know what my form is. With old poems I have to go back and study it like a graduate student, because I forget it, suppress it. I forget what I did, and that's why sometimes I keep these worksheets to look back and see what kind of little magical tricks I use to get to it.

MARX: Over the seven or eight years you have been writing poetry, do you feel you've developed in terms of form or style?

SEXTON: Well, perhaps, I would say I think the second book better written than the first and yet, in a way, I think the second lacks some of the impact and honesty of the first, which I wrote when I saw so raw that I didn't know any better. In the second book I knew a little bit more about how to write, and sometimes, perhaps, I cooled it too much. I didn't let myself go enough. I think maybe this will happen in a third book, which is not finished; that there are too many poems I'm not writing, that in a way I know too much. The first book was just kind of a miracle. I don't know how it came to be. There is some very bad writing in some of my best poems, and yet those flaws seem to me to make them even better. A little more honest in their own kind of silly way. There they are with all their flaws, a little more human, you might say.

MARX: Do you find that you deal very much with the same themes? There do seem to be recurring themes throughout.

SEXTON: Yes, there's the mother-child theme, and death very much, although, I think, maybe a little less. Any writer, any

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artist I'm sure, is obsessed with death, a prerequisite for life. I'm afraid they are quite repetitive, but I think that's all right. I don't think you need too many different themes. I could defend this, not just because it seems to be what I'm doing, but in other writers that I've loved. I could defend their repetition of a theme. I would say to have written this is a wonderful thing, about some other writer, and then I try not to condemn myself for not changing a little more, although my critics like it if I change. They want to see me broaden my scope and do something different.

MARX: Do you find you come to an understanding or a peace with the problems that you're dealing with, through writing about them all the time?

SEXTON: Just in a very small way, a very qualified way. There is a big change after you write a poem. It's a marvelous feeling, and there's a big change in the psyche, but I think you really go into great chaos just before you write a poem, and during it, and then to have come out of that whole, somehow is a small miracle, which lasts for a couple of days. Then on to the next.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THAT EXCELLENT MAN AND PIONEER BÜCHNER SCHOLAR, the late Karl Viëtor, used to tell me what hash Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre had made of *Danton's Death;* the current Herbert Blau production at Lincoln Center is, I say it with a heavy heart, Büchner's death all over again. Mr. Blau is a man of courage and integrity, and a driving intelligence fairly exudes from him, but this production is—what less can I say?—worthy of the old Lincoln Center management.

Contrary to popular belief, it is harder to put on a masterpiece than a lesser play—there is so much more to lose—and it is harder still to put on the delicate, poetic masterpiece of a youthful genius depending as yet much more on fragile brilliance than on canny know-how. The 21-year-old Büchner put his own disillusion with politics, his own fear of imminent arrest by the minions of a petty German princeling, his own inability (in his case, financial) to flee to safety, into this his first and only completed play. But he put other things into it as well: his understanding of and kinship with Shakespeare, which no one anywhere in that world of 1835 could begin to approach; his foreshadowing of naturalist and absurdist dramaturgy, undreamt-of in the philosophizings of the romantics and nascent realists; a concept of the historical play as sticking close to history, contrary to the established practice of Goethe and Schiller; and, above all, a deeply pessimistic but profoundly moving world view based on atheism, horror of mortality, loss of faith in people, and a sense of destiny as an obscure, despotic power we can neither controvert nor comprehend—yet also a belief in beauty, nobility of spirit, love—a *Weltanschauung* not unlike Schopenhauer's but independently arrived at.

What makes *Danton's Death* a unique play is that it picks for its hero a man already defeated by his disaffection, and that, despite a few relapses into heroism, this great man is seen sliding steadily downward into indifference and death by disgust. What makes the play an extraordinary achievement is that though about one sixth of it is historical fact and quotation, and the rest invention that accurately mirrors both the brutality of the times and the playwright's disenchantment, the language, from the outset, catches hold of poetry, and, though dragged through the mire of history and morass of hopelessness, never lets go. There is, if anything, an overdose of poetry in this play; simile, metaphor, symbol are not so much its utterance as its very breath; yet the imagery is handled with such integrity and tact that the personal flavor of each character is sovereignly preserved.

Thus, for example, Danton's images are often physiological, but

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still more often cosmic. "Nothingness has killed itself," says Danton, "creation is its wound, we are its blood drops, the world the grave in which it rots." On the eve of his execution, he looks at the sky and observes, "The stars spill through the night like shimmering tears; there must be a great misery in the eye from which they have dropped." Earlier, he had rebuked Robespierre against a cosmic background, "I should be ashamed of myself, running around for thirty years between heaven and earth with the same highly moral physiognomy, merely for the shabby satisfaction of finding others worse than myself." And, finally, we come full circle with the original image turned inside out, "The world is chaos. Nothingness is the world-god waiting to be born."

Clearly, the play is far less political, let alone revolutionary, than personal and universally human; the tragedy is that of the end of illusions, life, and love. Some of the most moving scenes show us suffering or dying women; and it is as lovers of women and lusty living that men recoil from death, not as frustrated saviors of mankind. Herbert Blau, however, has given us a play whose political presence far outweighs its personal, poetic one. This may be partly due to Blau's greater feeling for the social than for the lyrical, but it is also a problem of the immense stage he is saddled with. For this is a stage that is really two stages: a spacious thrust stage behind which there is a huge proscenium stage. Even when the latter is cut off, the effect is not, as in bona fide open-stage theatres, that of our looking at a piece of architecture that naturally abuts on and delimits the open space. Rather, we look at a heavy black guillotine that has severed the body of the stage from the now unattached head with which we are left.

Thus when an intimate scene is called for, a performer is adrift on a flat, wide, vast blackness behind him that disunites him from illusion and reality alike. And Blau does not even provide him with a small box set or a few honest props, which would afford him moorings or, at least, bearings. Furthermore, Jo Mielziner's stage design suggests a Chiricoized version of a Renaissance *trompe-l'oeil* perspective, a kind of surrealist Vicenza, which has nothing to say to the play just as the play has nothing to say to it.

At that, the floating panels, rolled-in-and-out units of scenery, concentrically revolving strips of stage, Pentecostal barrage of overhead lights perform spectacularly; it is a stage on which every mechanical prospect pleases, and only man is vile. What a company of charmless actors Blau has assembled! Not so much a company as a raggle-taggle mob, but one that cannot portray even a raggle-taggle mob. Here are performers left over from the Whitehead-Kazan *ancien régime,* a number of *ci-devants* whom Blau and Irving brought along as their baggage from San Francisco, and some sort of third estate hastily recruited hereabouts. But diverse as they are, let it be said, they sink as a perfect ensemble. At best, we have Robert Symonds's Robespierre, a good impersonation of an American businessman turned scoutmas-

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ter; at worst, Roscoe Lee Brown's Saint-Just, a lisping, effeminate, Negro hobgoblin, who looks as though the only phrase he could utter would be "Trick or treat!" There are two large contingents of mouthers and simperers, the former led by Michael Granger, James Earl Jones, and Paul Mann; the latter, by David J. Stewart and Claudette Nevins.

Under Blau's direction, the crowd scenes have some vitality, though even that is too mechanistic—thus, for example, the oppressively sexual character of the promenade scene in act two is not conveyed. But the private scenes, like the death of Julie, Danton's wife, are totally ineffectual: Julie dies like something out of a training film for gymnasts, in slow motion and with stop shots. The very opening and closing scenes of the play are, in fact, mishandled. Blau begins with a pantomime of his own invention, supposedly ominous, but looking for all the world like Anthony Tudor's comic ballet, *The Judgment of Paris*. The breathtaking final scene, the self-immolation of Lucile Desmoulins, which should be either pathetically childlike or quietly heroic, is staged as a hasty yet stiff theatrical postscript, neither unassuming nor transfigured.

It must, however, be stressed that Blau has given us what seems to be a sturdy and sinewy translation of Büchner's text, making up in punch what it may lack in poetry. There is none of that deadly translator's grey to his lines, though I wish he had resisted the occasional urge to rewrite or interpolate, however slightly. The cuts, on the whole, are tolerable, although, for example, it makes little sense, if you have cut the ailing Fabre out of the play, to put his dying words into the healthy Philippeau's mouth. And I do regret the omission of Lucile's mad scene, especially as its removal makes nonsense of one of the most beautiful speeches of the play, in which her husband, Camille, talks of her madness as an enchanting child she has given birth to, that, together, they would have dandled and kissed.

Even so, there is more hope for a new group that fails with *Danton's Death*, than for one that might succeed with *After the Fall*.

The amazing difference that a theatre, both stage and auditorium, can make is well illustrated by the case of Peter Shaffer's *Royal Hunt of the Sun*. At Chichester, on an open stage, and with parts of the auditorium becoming acting or music-and-sound-producing areas, with the sun emblem that turns inner stage differently positioned, the play looked like an adequate, though undistinguished, text for a superlative production. Now, at the ANTA Theatre, it looks pretentious and sounds hollow. Yet it has the same talented director, John Dexter, and the physical properties and costumes seem unaltered.

True, the cast is a different kettle of fish. As Pizarro, the conquistador who begins by chasing after mortal riches but ends by desperately searching for the conquest of mortality, Christopher Plummer gives a clever, mannered, solipsistic, and, above all, civilian characterization, woefully short of Colin Blakely's at Chichester: soldierly, efficient,

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lopped down to foursquare essentials—a cube of compressed energy, truly pathetic in his final, ravaged state. George Rose's narrator is bland and bibulous, and never conveys the scarcely contained emotion and sense of fierce futility that irradiated Robert Lang's reading of the part at Chichester. David Carradine, as the Inca king who believes himself literally immortal, does at least communicate energy and magnetism, but even this is a far cry from what Robert Stephens achieved in Laurence Olivier's production: the summoning up of an entirely different species of being, amoral, feline, simian, cunning, noble, anachronistic, otherworldly—perhaps, indeed, divine. As for the rest of the cast, they were, like their uncouthly mixed and wavering accents (none of that at Chichester), performing painfully *ad hoc*. And, speaking of accents, mannerisms, and appearances, Plummer's were surely the oddest: this bizarre Pizarro looked like a cross between Shakespeare's fat knight and Cervantes' gaunt one, and by way of trying to sound Spanish, managed a Jewish accent—let us hope, Sephardic.

Now the trouble with the play is that its vast scope and primal theme require a commensurate language, but Shaffer's tends to settle for pseudopoetics: "So much for the hunt. Now, between two frozen bastards, the unimaginable kill," which, to me, suggests two arctic explorers who have forgotten their mittens trying vainly to bag a polar bear. But Shaffer has attempted something worthy in this play, which, at Chichester, did come off: making the theatre visual again. By this, I do not mean sight gags or mere tricky visual effects, in which the typical Broadway play, such as this season's *Generation,* crudely abounds. I mean using the stage as a provider of illusions, illusions without which we can continue to live, but emotionally wither away. In Shaffer's play, not only do the rituals of two widely differing religions come alive, but there is also intelligent and evocative use of sound and space, of costumes and masks; even a massacre or the climbing of the Andes by a troop of armored men and horses is suggested in a wonderfully stylized way derived from Noh.

There is a widespread notion that the theatre is not threatened by films and television because it is *real,* because it is flesh and blood. On the contrary, photography and cinematography have made such progress in acquiring a stunning vocabulary of lifelikeness that it is the movies that seem real to us—at least as real as our lives. But the theatre is the last remaining temple of unreality, of illusions: where real, breathing, sweating people can, seemingly, defy the laws of time and space, the very law of gravity, the gravity of death even, which Shaffer's Pizarro fails to conquer. It is not in every part of the theatre that we ask for this, but somewhere in it it must be maintained; if, as it is in danger of being, it is wholly lost, the theatre, like Atahuallpa the Inca, will someday lie there murdered, and, to the horror of those keeping vigil, never rise again.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

EVEN SOMEONE WHOSE SELECTION OF NEW WORKS has shown as little sense for what is and what is not worth producing as Julius Rudel will now and then make a correct decision. A couple of years ago he put on Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and last fall he opened the New York City Opera's season with Prokofiev's *The Flaming Angel.* This opera was written in the first years of Prokofiev's artistic maturity, in which he produced his best works—the *Scythian Suite,* the Violin Concerto No. 1, the Piano Concerto No. 3, the score for Balanchine's *The Prodigal Son*; and like them it exhibits impressive powers exercised with youthful spontaneity and exuberance, this time in the continuous flow of resourcefully imaginative orchestral writing that is an effective supporting and commenting context for the expressive vocal arioso and declamation. But not for the first time the expressive music is applied to a dramatic action—about the havoc produced by the hallucinations of a mentally unhinged girl in 16th-century Germany—which provides an additional argument for hearing opera in foreign languages one can't understand. And in the performance directed by Frank Corsaro one was disturbed further by seeing things like the girl's lover looking or moving aimlessly about the stage at times when he should have been still and listening intently to what she was telling him. The music was paced effectively by Rudel, and had Eileen Schauler employing her beautiful and powerful voice eloquently in the leading role.

Reading about the newly formed Guarneri Quartet last spring, I was interested in whether its four string-players of virtuoso caliber—the first violin, Arnold Steinhardt, was a winner of the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels—would prove to be a replacement for the regrettably short-lived New Music Quartet. And at one of the concerts the group gave last summer in Harvard's Sanders Theater I had an opportunity to hear that while it didn't achieve the sheer incandescence, technical and musical, of the New Music Quartet's operation, it was clearly and unquestionably first-class and superior to any string quartet I have heard recently. Understandably, it did not, in the opening Quartet K. 589 of Mozart, operate with the relaxed ease and security, and therefore the effectiveness and impressiveness, that it attained later in Alban Berg's Quartet Op. 3 and Dvořák's Op. 105; however, even in the Mozart its playing was that of a first-class group which hadn't yet worked off its initial tenseness. But in the *Boston Globe* the next day I found this difference between the later and early playing enormously magnified in Michael Steinberg's statement that

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"depending on the repertory, the Guarneris can be a group of the most impressive expertness or one that is just the raw material of a good string quartet," and his further statement about the "style of playing [in the Mozart] wherein every phrase had one explosion while the rest was mumbled unintelligibly." Recalling the earlier instances of such strikingly immoderate statement in Steinberg's reviews, I now realized that it was habitual, and that it represented an important defect in Steinberg: his lack of the discipline a critic must have in addition to the initial perception Steinberg has—the discipline that holds eye, mind and pen strictly to what is to be perceived in the object before him. This kept Steinberg from being as good a critic as he was equipped to be, and made one unable to read him with confidence that a good thing was as good as he said, or a bad thing as bad, or even, on occasion, that what he spoke of had happened at all.

Landowska on Music[1] brings to mind someone's remark once about how much went into the making of an established poet besides the mere writing of poetry. For with the musical gifts that produced her best performances, Landowska had the gift for self-promotion that won her the status of a deity who commanded rapturous acceptance of her worst excesses of later years. Even newspaper gossips had learned to refer to her as the "high priestess of the harpsichord" in their columns, in which she gushed archly about her communion with "my Bach and the others" who told her they were happy to be alone with her in her Lakeville house, and about her dedication of herself to "my last will and testament"—her recording of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which the high priestess offered as divine revelation, but whose distortions of tempo and phrase had no discoverable basis other than the lifelong self-assertion that had grown to the point where musical intelligence and taste no longer exercised any restraint on what was asserted in the playing. The self-promotion included the way, at a concert, she glided mincingly toward the harpsichord, primly holding up her voluminous skirt, and sank into a prayerful pose on the chair. And it included a large amount of writing, some of which is reprinted as Holy Writ in *Landowska on Music*.

The early writing in the collection, represented by a condensed version of her 1908 book, *Music of the Past*, was part of her battle for a cause—for recognition of the value of 18th-century music in its original state, performed on the instruments it was written for by musicians who knew how to execute the ornaments, to vary the repetitions, and to do whatever else was required to bring the music to life from the written page in the style of its period. But the later writing, done long after that battle had been won, was part of her battle for herself—her attempt to win acceptance for whatever she chose to do, for which she claimed the sanction of authenticity if it justified her, but, when it did

[1] LANDOWSKA ON MUSIC, collected, edited and translated by *Denise Restout*, assisted by *Robert Hawkins*. Stein and Day. $12.50.

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not, set above it the supreme law of her own interpretive insight. On the one hand (p. 307), on behalf of her playing of some Mozart piano pieces, she claims knowledge of the "science of touch" that can achieve on the modern piano the various colors of the keyboard instruments of Mozart's time; but although some listeners no doubt are persuaded by this that they hear in the playing those sounds of the 18th-century clavichord, harpsichord and pianoforte, I could hear only the sounds of Landowska's 20th-century Steinway; and—more important—I heard in her playing of those pieces the arbitrary distention of tempo and phrase, the thumping of bass, the graceless enunciation of melody, that even the 18th-century sounds wouldn't have justified. And on the other hand, one finds her writing about her harpsichord performances (p. 356): ". . . I am sure that what I am doing in regard to sonority, registration, etc., is very far from the historical truth. . . . At no time in the course of my work have I ever tried to reproduce exactly what the old masters did. Instead, I study, I scrutinize, I love, and I recreate. . . . With the Jesuits I say, 'The result sanctifies the means.' . . . I am aware that the disposition of the registers in the harpsichords of Bach's time differed somewhat from those of my Pleyel. But little do I care if, to attain the proper effect, I use means that were not exactly those available to Bach"—which is what Stokowski says in justification of *his* excesses. Or (p. 407) "If Rameau himself would rise from his grave to demand of me some changes in my interpretation of his *Dauphine*, I would answer, 'You gave birth to it; it is beautiful. But now leave me alone with it. You have nothing more to say; go away!' . . . I know that while playing *La Dauphine* I take incredible liberties. Rameau improvised this piece during wedding festivities. Why couldn't I do it too?" The answer to her "why" is that Rameau had the privileges of the composer of the piece and an extraordinary improviser, neither of which Landowska was. And her improvisation in *La Dauphine* amounts to less than the extravagances of pace, style and registration I heard in her performances of this and the other pieces in her recorded *Treasury of Harpsichord Music*.

Only recently did I learn from a musician with the necessary special knowledge that the musical as well as the registrational excesses in those performances resulted from Landowska's use of "my Pleyel," with its differences from the harpsichords for which "my Bach and the others" wrote their music. As she knew better than Rameau about his *Dauphine*, so she knew better than he about the instrument to play it on. According to my informant, the Pleyel, even before she made it "hers," had the defects and disadvantages of a design and construction more like that of the modern piano than that of the classical harpsichord. As against the latter's long, thin strings, its thin, sensitive soundboard, its light bridge, its light, responsive action, the Pleyel had thick strings, a heavy soundboard with under-ribbing more appropriate to a piano, a large, heavy bridge, and what was essentially a piano

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keyboard with a heavy, soggy action. As a result it produced a relatively weak, unresonant, lusterless 8-foot sound; and since the harpsichord's 8-foot sound is basic, with the others accessory, this was an important deficiency (it was the reason for Landowska's frequent use of the 4-foot stop played down an octave and the 16-foot stop played up an octave for the "singing" sound she couldn't obtain from either 8-foot). And the deficiency of the 8-foot sound was increased by the presence of the 16-foot stop, with its heavy bridge and string tension, that she insisted on having added to "my Pleyel." True, a few 18th-century harpsichords have a 16-foot register—but with a separate soundboard *outside* the standard 8-foot instrument, so that it doesn't have the detrimental effect on the 8-foot sound that it has *inside* Landowska's Pleyel. And it was to prevent the listener's being bored by the dullness of this 8-foot sound, my informant thought, that Landowska kept changing registration, with destructive effect on the continuity of musical flow and structure not only from the constant changes in color but from the retardations and distentions of tempo needed for the making of the registrational changes.

It was, I might add finally, the Landowska who glided mincingly to a prayerful pose before the harpsichord who wrote (p. 364): "At no time in my teaching did I ever think of exposing publicly the mistakes of a pupil. Foresight, maternal solicitude, care to prevent . . . catastrophe for a student unaccustomed to play for an audience—such have always been my dominant thoughts," but one of whose practices on such public occasions—eyewitnesses told me—was to have a pupil play, and then to reduce him (or her) to insignificance with her own more imposing performance of the piece. (An American pianist who played the *Goldberg Variations* on the piano told me with amusement of her persistent attempts, at a party once, to get him to give her an opportunity for this one-upmanship by showing her how he played certain passages.)

As against Landowska, Marc Blitzstein had a gift for self-promotion that won him his established position even without genuine creative musical gifts. The evidence of the gift for self-promotion was last year's obituary tributes and memorial concert; the evidence of the lack of creative gifts was his musical works. I made the acquaintance of the gift for self-promotion in 1926, when I had published my first occasional pieces of critical writing, and a Philadelphia friend wrote that Blitzstein was interested in meeting me. Not more than two minutes after his arrival he was seated at the piano, playing from an impressive many-staved and beautifully written manuscript the music for a projected ballet, *Cain*, and expounding the esthetic basis of this and that detail. And in 1931 I had barely arrived at Yaddo when I found myself in his studio, listening to him play from another impressive many-staved and beautifully written manuscript the inconsequential piano concerto he was writing for the League of Composers, while he ex-

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pounded *its* esthetic basis. This was the last occasion of its kind for me, but not for other people; and the talk about the why and the how that didn't persuade me did persuade these others of the value and importance of the what—the actual music that in fact had no value or importance. The talk changed with the years: In the early 30's when Blitzstein was writing for the small League of Composers audience a string quartet with the novel feature of all three movements in Largo tempo, the talk was about achieving differentiation of the movements through changes of texture instead of changes of tempo. Later, when he had obtained the attention of a larger audience with music about the class struggle, the talk was about other novel features—for example, the love duet of the working-class couple in *No For an Answer* in which the boy sang, "Fra-a-a-ancie, ta-ta-ta-ta-ta." And later still Blitzstein contributed to the talk about the American musical show as the basis of the American opera—this in connection with his setting of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* in his opera, *Regina,* and of O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* in his musical show, *Juno.*

As for the works themselves, I described once, in these pages, the destructive effect, in *Regina,* of Blitzstein's musical-show writing on certain of the serious dramatic situations of the Hellman play, and on the other hand the failure of his attempts at serious operatic writing for other situations; and, in *Juno,* the falsification of the situations of both pathos and comedy of the O'Casey play by the musical-show lyrics and tunes—more monstrous since it was inflicted on a great play. On another occasion I pointed out that even in 1937 the text of *The Cradle Will Rock*—which won for the work the attention the music would not have won—was a crude agit-prop caricature of the situation it dealt with, on the intellectual level of readers of the *Daily Worker.* And last year's production of the original Brecht-Weill *Dreigroschenoper* revealed how the work had been falsified by the English words and the scoring of Blitzstein's *Three Penny Opera.* We lost with his death not an important creator of American music, but only someone with the ability to perusade a lot of people, including some who should have known better, that he was the important creator he actually was not.

For a performance in the obituary style carried to sheer farce, I offer Harold C. Schonberg's *Times* piece on Galli-Curci. Titled *Galli-Curci the Stylist,* it contended that she was not a flamboyant or an extroverted coloratura singer but "primarily a musical one," and that "her recording of the 'Caro nome' from Verdi's *Rigoletto,* made around 1919, stands as probably the greatest performance ever put on a disk. . . . Musically it is of extreme elegance. . . . Every phrase is turned with extreme finesse and sensitivity, and with a delicate sense of rhythmic variation that lent all kinds of shadows to the performance." Schonberg knows all the right words, but not the right performance to apply them to. I couldn't say of any one performance that it was *the* greatest

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ever put on a disk; but there are coloratura performances I would say were *among* the greatest on records; and these include some of Hempel's and Ivogün's, but not Galli-Curci's and not her *"Caro nome"*—the difference being precisely Hempel's and Ivogün's possession of the musical style Galli-Curci lacked. One can say for her *"Caro nome"* that her fresh voice flows simply and prettily through most of it; but several times she holds on to the initial note of a phrase, not for the additional moment or two that would produce stylistic emphasis within the shape of the phrase, but for the many moments—in order to show off the prettiness of the voice—that each time pull the phrase out of shape. A more striking demonstration of her deficiency is provided by the 1928 recorded performance of *"Parigi, o cara"* from *La Traviata*, in which Schipa sings first with the delicate tonal and rhythmic inflections and accents of an enchantingly elegant musical style, and Galli-Curci answers with a spineless, characterless slithering around of her by now unattractive-timbred voice.

Some of the material in the Deutsch *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*[2] is of no interest to the general reader; but some of it—the printed and written reports of where and what and for whom Mozart played this day and the next, what operas of his were performed where, what works publishers announced for sale, what was said about him in the announcements, in the press, in letters, in diaries—is enlightening, fascinating and moving. Enlightening, since it establishes the recognition of Mozart's pre-eminence in his lifetime, which didn't keep him from dying in wretched poverty; fascinating and moving, since it gives his day-to-day existence such immediacy.

The New York City Ballet's fall season after its return from Europe offered no new works, but only a few changes in certain old ones. One of these was last spring's new *Don Quixote:* in Act 1 the townspeople and Don Quixote withdrew to the back and sides of the stage, providing a greater space for the deployment of Marcela's exquisite dance; in Act 2 there were changes in a couple of the divertissements, and Mimi Paul danced the *Ritornel* with her pointed-up elegance. In addition there were the increased security and effectiveness of Suzanne Farrell, Mimi Paul, Richard Rapp and the rest, the increased smoothness and coherence of the performance, that contributed to the strengthening of the beautiful and wonderfully imagined work.

It seemed to me that there were slight changes in the 25-year-old *Concerto Barocco* in addition to a striking new leg movement of the corps in the middle of the Adagio that my eye found damaging to the sequence in which it occurred. On this occasion Mimi Paul danced the lead with her authority and beautiful style; but the image created by her thin body and its sharp movements was not as lovely as the one

[2] MOZART: A DOCUMENTARY BIOGRAPHY, by *Otto Erich Deutsch*. Stanford University Press. $17.50.

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created by Marnee Morris's fleshier body and more flowing movements in the second role. With Verdy absent again, Paul took over her role in *Liebesliederwalzer,* in which she achieved exciting effectiveness in the second part, where the dancers change to short diaphanous ballet skirts and toe shoes for their pointed-toe extensions and lifts: in these the configurations of Paul's body in motion were breathtakingly beautiful. In *Four Temperaments* the one change was Gloria Govrin's increased bulkiness, which lessened the impressiveness of her performance in the Sanguinic Variation (a change I suggest is to have Arthur Mitchell do the Melancholic Variation and Richard Rapp the Phlegmatic). And *Raymonda Variations* was newly enriched by Farrell's enchanting performance. For the rest there were the familiar things that were as exciting as if seen for the first time: the Kent-Villella *Bugaku, Episodes* with Kent and Paul, *La Sonnambula* with Kent and Jillana, *Scotch Symphony* with Kent, *Tarantella* and *Pas de Deux* with Villella, Farrell's performances in *Liebesliederwalzer* and *Agon,* Paul's Third Theme in *The Four Temperaments.*

HENRY GELDZAHLER

Happenings: Theater by Painters

HAPPENINGS ARE THEATER BY ARTISTS. The emphasis is therefore quite naturally visual rather than verbal. The strength and interest of a Happening when it is successful is in the force of its imagery, the carrying power of its props, situations, costumes and sequences. In this they relate, perhaps nostalgically, rather more to silent movies with their forceful visual nonsense, than to anything in the highly verbal Theater of the Absurd. If the Happenings are seen as an attempt on the part of painters to reintroduce recognizable, human content into our artistic life, and if the matrix from which they sprang can be seen as an involvement in Abstract Expressionism and a reaction by younger artists against its persuasiveness, we are well into the generative processes that made it necessary for several artists in the same year to work out parallel solutions.

The situation in American art in the late nineteen-fifties made a way back to painting or representing the human figure in any new, contemporary, meaningful way seem impossible. After the tremendous energy and inventiveness of abstract painting, centered in New

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York in the forties and fifties, the reintroduction of recognizable content (objects, landscape or the figure) appeared *retardataire* and beside the point. The main issues that engaged the best and most mature artists were abstract manners and imagery personally arrived at and subsequently staked out. These men left no room for the younger artist who was not satisfied to choose between the manner of de Kooning and that of, let us say, Guston. There were, to be sure, still implications to be worked out by younger men in directions suggested by the relatively little known paintings of Newman and Reinhardt; these were to engage the sensibilities of the cool young non-romantics (Stella, Poons, Judd, Irwin and others). But where could a richly romantic personality express itself in fresh terms after the license and extravagances of the most richly romantic artists in our history, the Abstract Expressionists?

Robert Rauschenberg pointed a way out of this dilemma by his inclusion of the real object in the work of art. Instead of representing a goat, that is, attempting to translate a goat into the two-dimensional terms of painting, Rauschenberg, shockingly, included the goat itself (stuffed but only slightly less a goat for that). There was ample precedent in kind for Rauschenberg's decision, if not in degree. His invention was to take collage, a staid and almost stately cubist technique, and push it radically, logically and consciously to conclusions that were inherent some four decades earlier in the first gluing of a real newspaper, or swatch of wallpaper, to an oil painting. Thus one way out of the dilemma, how to represent the recognizable, was clearly not to represent it but to incorporate it.

It was in this atmosphere in 1959 that the Happenings were born, an atmosphere in which abstract art had been dominant for more than a decade, and in which the shock and invention were not only Rauschenberg's radical collage, but the younger artist Jasper Johns's targets and American flags, frankly two-dimensional subjects which did not so much have to be represented as presented. Thus, Johns and Rauschenberg, stand as the major figures, transitional in retrospect, between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Their work of the mid-fifties helped point to a way out of abstraction that had not been preempted by artists of the past. The crucial factor in innovational art is never newness or novelty as an end in itself. But, although repetition in modes already thoroughly occupied must be stale, we still had critics crying for a revival of the art they had liked in their earlier years. A new humanism was what they wanted. When they got Happenings and Pop Art, a new art with human content, it did not look exactly as they had expected, and they were disapproving—once again indicating that art precedes criticism, an often strangely forgettable truism.

Here we have an indication as to why the early practitioners of the Happening—Red Grooms, Alan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Olden-

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burg and Bob Whitman—remain the interesting ones, and also why their more recent work in this medium has decreased in energy. The common solution to the apparently insoluble problem bound them together for several years. But once this shared interest in theater was explored and each created his several worlds of imagery, they turned to the more lasting and traditional media of their art: painting, collage and sculpture. Only Alan Kaprow has remained exclusively with Happenings. The men who did the first Happenings have had no very convincing followers; just as there have been no very convincing Pop artists after the first wave broke in 1960 (Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Wesselman, Oldenburg). The reasons are clear; both Happenings and Pop Art were vital solutions to the crisis of artists, all between their early twenties to thirties, who were searching for a way into suitable expression. Once they invented and staked out their ways, separate but related, those who came after were no longer faced with the same type of dilemma. A way had been worked out, a style invented and the result was too comfortable, too clearly marked, for those that followed to feel the challenge. What resulted was what might lightly be called second generation art (in less than half a decade); Pop Art and Happenings by minor talents who poured their content, sometimes quite individual, into forms that had been forged, ready-made for them, by the originators, the first and only solvers of the problem. Thus also, when in the Spring of 1965 Dine, Whitman and Oldenburg, themselves the originators of the Happenings, mounted new works, there was a staleness about their own continued efforts, which were still fresher than those of any of their imitators, but not as necessary or compelling as their Happenings of 1960-61.

Although John Cage's theoretical writings and ideas are often cited as the single source, the sources of the Happenings are complex. Cage writes in the Foreword to his remarkable book *Silence* (Wesleyan University Press, 1961):

> At Black Mountain College in 1952, I organized an event that involved the paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, the dancing of Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M. C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, and the pianism of David Tudor, together with my Juilliard lecture, which ends: "A piece of string, a sunset, each acts." The audience was seated in the center of all this activity. Later that summer, vacationing in New England, I visited America's first synagogue, to discover that the congregation was there seated precisely the way I had arranged the audience at Black Mountain.

It is true that Alan Kaprow took a course in composition with Cage at the New School, an exposure which surely loosened and prepared him for his *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (1959—the first use of the name Happening). However, the various theatrical forms and

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specific types of content that were the work of Oldenburg, Dine, Whitman and even Kaprow had much less to do with the style and spirit of Cage, than with German Expressionism, or our own Abstract Expressionism, which was an art of excess. What Cage stands for might be characterized as a neo-dada flight from excess which resulted in compelling works that were only apparently simple-minded and absurd (Jasper Johns is in some measure their visual equivalent).

All the artists involved in Happenings from their inception were connected with the Reuben Gallery in downtown Manhattan. Much of the history of this movement and some valuable documents, statements by the artists and scripts of the Happenings, are brought together in the first book on the movement, *Happenings* by Michael Kirby (Dutton, 1965). He discusses possible antecedents of Happenings, among them Kurt Schwitters and his Merz poetry:

> In contrast to the drama or the opera, all parts of the Merz stage work are inseparably bound up together; it cannot be written, read or listened to, it can only be produced in the theater. Up until now, a distinction was made between stage-set, text, and score in theatrical performances. Each factor was separately enjoyed. The Merz stage knows only the fusing of all factors into a composite work. Materials for the stage-set are all solid, liquid, non-gaseous bodies, such as white wall, man, barbed wire entanglement, blue distance.

This statement was first published (in German) in 1921. In its breakdown of established categories and in its fusion of elements it must be considered a theoretical forerunner of the Happenings. Kirby also cites Tzara, Picabia, Satie, Cage, Schlemmer and the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, and Antonin Artaud as possible sources and forerunners, as well as certain of the more theatrical Surrealist manifestations (for example Duchamp's creating a room crossed by thousands of feet of string through which the spectator had to climb to view the 1942 New York Surrealist Exhibition).

The distinction must be made between a Happening, in which the audience is relatively fixed, and an Environment, in which the audience moves at will through a predetermined, structured space such as Duchamp's strings. The Environment is static in the tradition of the work of art; it is there and can be contemplated, experienced, and walked away from like a work of art. A Happening, on the other hand, exists in time as well as in space, and is therefore in composition related rather more to music and to theater than to painting and sculpture. Both Happenings and Environments are logical extensions of the work of the painter-sculptor mentality, the one in time and space, the other uniquely in space.

But the internal dilemma of painting was only one reason for the invention of an improvisational visual theater; there was also an impatience with the live theater, and with film that was still tied to the

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old forms. In 1961 (in an unpublished statement) Claes Oldenburg wrote:

> Test of film is what do you remember. Not the narrative but the images and in this sense the narrative is not important. I think it is so with theater too which I see not as a literary art primarily but a visual art . . . film has been dominated by theater and literature . . . it is a visual medium of course.

Film has fascinated and sometimes even preoccupied the recent generation of artists. The reason is surely, at least in part, the shifting forms on the large rectangle, which is the given shape of the movie screen as it is of the painting. It is also, conversely, for this reason that the traditional proscenium theater has seemed so tedious, so verbal and non-visual. Here again we are faced with a rectangle, but with, even at best, relatively static sets. Whatever movement or eye-engagement there is is in the movement of the actors; actors who in a normal proscenium situation occupy about the lower fifth of their rectangular box. To a generation brought up to look and look hard at paintings and movies, (both growing into over-size, in the past fifteen years) there is simply not enough to look at in the proscenium theater or, for that matter, in the concert hall. This has been a major reason for the fascination of the Happening, theater that surrounds the viewer immediately with an absolute minimum of distance, both physical and, when it works, psychological. Having actors on the spot and occupying the same space as the audience was a refreshing and involving visual experience after the coolness and distance of the theater.

Oldenburg again (unpublished):

> When sitting in a certified theater I find myself always watching what I am not supposed to; the peeling walls, the frayed rugs, the crossing and uncrossing legs of girls in the audience, etc. etc. and I see no reason for eliminating the power which place has over the audience.

Here we have a basic tenet of the Happening; the audience and the performance are surrounded by what happens; the action is never merely dead ahead but in several possible directions at once. The viewer must make choices, decide which action to follow if several are proceeding at once, or where the next event is likely to occur if nothing is going on for the moment. Thus each viewer or participant experiences a slightly different aspect of the multiplicity that occurs. This is particularly clear in the radically different photographs and film footage by different hands that are the only residue of each Happening. The viewer is not only in a position to make choices, he is forced to do so.

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On the content of a Happening Oldenburg writes:

> It could be described as a short novel in which objects, rather than the description of objects, make up the language, a language which is necessarily more suggestive and on a more intuitive level. The composition as form is prearranged (that is, there are scripts) though rather freely—but the composition as meaning is not—that is a matter for the individual. . . . Needless to say the audience is also part of the event, which is not to be taken to mean that they are expected to contribute in any other way than has been determined by the arrangements made for their bodies.

A script exists, a series of impressions, possible working ideas, but the final determination is made by the cast reacting to Oldenburg's (or Dine's or Whitman's) formal vocabulary. Oldenburg, in his first working ideas, thinking on paper about a new Happening (*Washes*, 1965) notes:

> A cast will not be made up of actors or dancers, but of people I have come across or will come across in the remaining time, people whose use is suggested by some evident beauty or significant characteristics, for their suitability to the other parts and the themes as they develop; people whom I meet in the course of a day's events and who have the time to help me. They will not speak; they are my motors. My work with them will consist in finding out how to put them in natural motion by presenting them with a simple action or an object.

The description of a Happening can in no way replace the viewing of one. The types of props, characteristic space, extraordinary visual leaps from image to image do not lend themselves to verbal description. What does remain is films or photographs, memory cues to those who were present but rather formal and unrevealing of continuity to everyone else. The parallel may be made with Rubens' temporary triumphal arches in Antwerp, hung with hastily executed paintings, and with Bernini's plaster catafalque for a funeral, monumental efforts which were ephemeral by intent. From the Renaissance we have etchings and engravings which give us an idea of what these extravagances might have looked like. Today we have films and photographs, our contemporary print media and memorabilia, to record dead Happenings.

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PAUL LEVINE

Some Middle-Aged Fiction

THAT, YEATS SAID OF BYZANTIUM, is no country for old men. Well, neither is *this,* I fear, for the modern climate is too rarefied for any but the adolescent in heart and mind. The accent is definitely on youth and we watch raptly as the Rolling Stones teach us to gather no moss or Tom Wolfe proves that out of the mouths of Baby Jane Holzers mostly comes drivel. Is it boredom that makes the Beatles our hard day's knights or is it simply blithe spirits that finds it more appealing to watusi with Luci than to reason with Lyndon?

Yet our worship of youth is firmly based upon our obsession with experience and there comes a point in life when raw experience is simply not enough. We watch the Beat Generation all growing up to be paunchy Peter Pans and suddenly they seem as sad as the Pepsi Generation. Even the lean hipsters and the Angry Young Men of yesteryear become middle-aged Young Sociables. They grow balder and more comfortable in the Establishments around the world: Norman Mailer running errands at *Esquire* and Kingsley Amis pasting together his James Bond dossier.

These thoughts were prompted by a curious consistency in the fiction of recent months.[1] With few exceptions these books are concerned with the problems of maturity, not of youth. Slowly, the focus has shifted from rebellious adolescence to restless middle age: clearly, Holden Caulfield is out and Moses Herzog is in. An aged, sex-obsessed Japanese; an aging, ironic German veteran; a middle-aged American lesbian; and a rebellious British worker, husband, and father of two: these are the protagonists in recent fiction. They take us into a seemingly older fictive realm in which dreams have ended in oppressive responsibilities and the modern world has come of middle age.

[1] A STORY FOR TEDDY, by Harvey Swados. *Simon and Schuster.* $5.00. ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE, by Heinrich Böll. *McGraw-Hill.* $3.95. THE FENCING MASTER, by Gilbert Rogin. *Random House.* $4.95. THE PEACOCK'S TAIL, by Edward Hoagland. *McGraw-Hill.* $5.50. THE DEATH OF WILLIAM POSTERS, by Alan Sillitoe. *Knopf.* $4.95. MIDNIGHT COWBOY, by James Leo Herlihy. *Simon and Schuster.* $4.95. THE DESERT OF THE HEART, by Jane Rule. *World.* $4.95. TOTEMPOLE, by Sanford Friedman. *Dutton.* $5.95. THE YOUNG VISITORS, by John Wain. *Viking.* $4.50. DIARY OF A MAD OLD MAN, by Junichiro Tanizaki. *Knopf.* $3.95. THE SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE WITH THE SEA, by Yukio Mishima. *Knopf.* $3.95. SLOWLY, BY THY HAND UNFURLED, by Romulus Linney. *Harcourt, Brace, and World.* $4.50. THE PLAYER KING, by Earl Rovit. *Harcourt, Brace and World.* $5.95.

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Harvey Swados, in *A Story for Teddy,* evokes this feeling when he defines the limits of his own short stories:

> For many years I have told a story on myself, the point of which was, I supposed, that as a young man I was a good-natured fool. Now, however, if I regard what happened not as a joke on me but as a revelation of what we are capable of, I remember something very different. It is as though my young protagonist were no longer the self I cherish with such wry and amused fondness, but had become instead a stranger—a wild and predatory stranger. But here is the story as I used to tell it.

The best stories in this collection concern the visions of youth as viewed from the vantage point of middle age. Whether describing his Coney Island Uncle or the hack writer who haunted his college days, Mr. Swados seems primarily concerned with his experience as recollected in some tranquility. The point, as in the rather touching title story, lies not in the events themselves but in the narrator's later understanding of them. "It is *this* story—called up by the sudden stinging recollection of two young strangers, the boy and girl at the last table of the garden restaurant, yearning for everything but understanding nothing—that is the real story for Teddy." Unfortunately, the stories themselves *are* slight and they are saved only occasionally by our faith in the honesty and sensitivity of the author. Since the process of transformation is often left out of the stories the reader is sometimes left with the peculiar predicament of believing in Mr. Swados but not in his tales.

Heinrich Böll's *Absent Without Leave* also concerns itself with the remembrance of things past but the literary figure it invokes is not Proust but Salinger. This may seem curious since both novellas in the volume are concerned with the German Past until we remember that remarkable Salinger story about the War, "For Esmé—With Love and Squalor." Like Salinger, Böll treats the war obliquely, picking up his characters before and after the hostilities. Yet Böll, like just about every other German novelist of his generation, is primarily concerned with national history and not a single sensibility. For that reason, perhaps, it was disconcerting to find the narrator of the long title novella sounding remarkably like Buddy Glass. Throughout, in fact, there were Salingerish touches—an obsession with telephones, digressions, and mystical visions—which tended to inflate the style at the same time as it depressed the substance. To be sure, Böll is a serious and competent writer on large and important issues but his work invariably miniaturizes the scope of his subject. However, it may be unfair to measure the size of Böll's talent on the basis of *Absent Without Leave* since it was written before his much acclaimed novel, *The Clown.*

The protagonist of Böll's novella is an anti-hero, an ironist who wishes to go "absent without leave" from his society and situation. The

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hero of several stories in Gilbert Rogin's *The Fencing Master,* appropriately named Lesser, is also a victim of circumstance, forced to lie in beds not of his own making. "How many times, Lesser thought, have I gone through this airport, the old one before this one was built, other dim and reverberant terminals, with the same hesitant, apprehensive tread, retracing, as upon those two upheaving afternoons long ago, my heedless, departing steps?" Mr. Rogin tells the same story over and over—about the alienated man trapped between approaching middle age and recurrent infantilism—but he tells it with insight and compassion that creates a kind of lyric of minor desolation. The stories are stylish in the *New Yorker* way and, consequently, they seem thinner when taken together than when read separately. The names and faces in *The Fencing Master* run together in one's memory but the recurring images of struggling swimmers and restless sleepers remain fixed in one's mind. Reading Mr. Rogin's stories is rather like watching someone drown in slow motion. Life here is more tedious than sordid, more sad than tragic but, as one character puts it, "It's better than a jab in the eye with a sharp stick."

The protagonists of Böll and Rogin are the kind of civilized incompetents who, like Prufrock, "will do/ To swell a progress, start a scene or two" but they are carefully tailored to the small scale of their respective worlds. There is no salvation in their cosmos; each character exists uncomfortably within the familiar limits of a well-turned tale. Thus the stories succeed in the same measure as the characters fail. The heroes of the new novels by Edward Hoagland and Alan Sillitoe, on the other hand, repudiate their purgatory to confront the possibilities of heaven and hell. In fact, they reverse the familiar process completely because their heroes achieve salvation at the expense of their stories. It might be too pat to argue that both novels fail because their protagonists succeed but it is true that each novelist's oversolicitous concern for his hero's redemption leads to the downfall of the novel.

It is instructive to view these two books together because they fail similarly in telling essentially the same tale. In both, a young man with more energy than wit turns his back on society and "goes underground" to make his separate peace outside the Establishment. In Mr. Hoagland's *The Peacock's Tail,* Ben Pringle becomes a fugitive from his suburban, Ivy League background when he suddenly loses his job, apartment and girl in one unlikely sweep. Unaccountably, he takes refuge in a seamy uptown hotel populated by Manhattan's underprivileged masses. Here Pringle discovers a mixed life more vital and meaningful than any he had ever imagined and he is led to salvation by enacting the role of Pied Piper to the neighborhood urchins.

I suspect that *The Peacock's Tail* is better than it sounds here because Mr. Hoagland seems unconcerned about such problems as moti-

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vation. Rather, the novel is a fantasy very much like "The Pied Piper" although its inner light is hidden under a bushel of frenetic, impressionistic prose:

> He chanted tongue twisters and hummed. "Snap out of it." He heard himself as if through plugs; wanted a bus. Mice probably felt like this when owls were out.—A ski-jump sneeze. He steered into the subway, the narrowness relieving him, and after he was on the platform his mind continued to trot down the stairs, trot down the stairs, in a replay, so that he minced and hunched. A rabbit's diving down its hole was not an ugly image to a rabbit. The train arrived and he walked forward to the front, relaxing in the roar. The subway rocked. The sweeping curves and straightaways, the flaring signals, the sudden yellow stations, the motorman behind the door, all boosted him. His jitters gradually slipped away beneath his feet and he was full of rumble, of health-gymnasium vibration. He yodelled, froze his nose against the glass, and thrust his eyes ahead for a cowcatcher, until he headed home at last, ready for sleep.

Hoagland keeps this sort of thing up throughout so that the reader is exhausted by the task of remaining on top of a style that threatens constantly to go completely out of control. Still, there are moments of marvelous lucidity when sound and sense are wedded with a striking immediacy that almost redeems the effort. But all the style in the world could not hide the fact that Ben Pringle is an unbelievable dullard.

In *The Death of William Posters,* Alan Sillitoe tells a similar story but without verbal fireworks. His hero, Frank Dawley, is a fugitive from the irritations of working class life in a welfare state. Fleeing from "the Bill Posters ethos," "the typical mentality of the workman-underdog," which is given human shape by the ubiquitous signs that "BILL POSTERS WILL BE PROSECUTED," Frank journeys from a remote English village to London and ultimately to North Africa where he finds a new life smuggling arms to the Algerian rebels.

Readers of Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* will recognize Frank as a somewhat older but still unreconciled Arthur Seaton:

> He was just above middle height, with grey eyes, and darkish hair that gave a sallow and tough appearance to his face. A fairly high forehead when he thought to brush his hair back denoted intelligence, though not the assurance of using it properly every time it was called for. A short white fishbone scar had stayed above the left eye after a pop bottle burst there as a kid. It was the face in which a smile would be giving too much away, betraying the dead-pan working-man exterior consciously maintained. Stern, it was fenced up to stop things coming in and going out, often with little success due to an exuberance over which he had little control.

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Behind all the detail is Sillitoe's frank admiration for his hero, the feeling that Lawrence had for Mellors and Hemingway had for Robert Jordan. Like Lawrence, Sillitoe is concerned with the modern feelings of alienation from meaningful work and sex; like Hemingway, he is bothered by the limitations of heroism in an overcivilized society. And like both at their worst, Sillitoe goes about showing his concern with a solemn and numbing earnestness which makes him take his hero more seriously than we can.

The Death of William Posters fails as a novel but it may be a significant failure in the sense that it goes beyond mere red brick anger into the realm of raw violence. The title refers to the death of "the Bill Posters ethos" and the rebirth of Frank Dawley as a kind of Cockney hipster. "The new man of the world must work and live as if he weren't going to be alive the next day," Frank says, in words that come perilously close to Norman Mailerism. "This would make him more careful and tender to others, not less." Yet, in fact, Frank is not more careful; he is a disrupter all along the way, finally leaving his pregnant mistress in Tangier to set out on a mission of death in the desert. Lawrence, I think, would have understood this for he saw beneath the surface of another new man, Cooper's Natty Bumppo, the hidden white killer. Whether Sillitoe recognizes all the implications of Frank's new life may be another matter.

The myth of the frontier hero is imaginatively and ironically treated in James Leo Herlihy's *Midnight Cowboy*. Only here, the drugstore cowboy, appropriately named Joe Buck, comes out of the West to seek his fortune at the last sexual frontier: Times Square. Buck's Wild West is really Marlboro Country, the phallic frontier of advertising and television, and like any Hollywood hero he comes into town with his gun for hire. Buck begins as "pure symbol, nothing more, nothing less" and the novel recounts his subsequent humanization. On the one hand, *Midnight Cowboy* is a grotesque comedy of bad sexual manners but, on the other, it carries the tragic implications of the death of a mythic hero and his rebirth as a man. Some readers may be reminded of James Purdy's *Malcolm* or *Cabot Wright Begins* but Mr. Herlihy, who established a minor reputation with *The Sleep of Baby Filbertson* and *All Fall Down,* is a much better writer than Purdy. In its subtle combination of American myth and black humor *Midnight Cowboy* suggests what *The Great Gatsby* might have been like if Nathanael West had written it. But this does not indicate the considerable individual talent that Mr. Herlihy brings to his midnight frontier.

Midnight Cowboy is only one of several new novels to deal with sexual deviations. In Jane Rule's *The Desert of the Heart* the subject of lesbianism is treated rather lyrically against the background of the human and natural wastelands of Nevada. In Sanford Friedman's *Totempole,* on the other hand, we get a clinical account of the sexual

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evolution of a homosexual. Miss Rule's novel is slight, sensitive, and sentimental; Mr. Friedman's is frank, tedious, and sentimental. I don't know if the limitations are inherent in the material, the treatment, or my imagination, but homosexual love scenes are invariably talky and mawkish, terribly serious and terribly dull. Aside from their subject matter, both novels are thoroughly conventional and, aside from their sexual inclinations, so are Miss Rule's middle-aged school teacher and Mr. Friedman's nice Jewish boy. Both writers are properly sympathetic but I thought that Mr. Friedman was a bit heavy-handed in naming his hero's single heterosexual partner after Fu Manchu.

John Wain's *The Young Visitors* is a conventional novel on the now unconventional theme of boy meets girl. Here English boy seduces Russian girl in one of those comedies of foreign relations. The boy is a predatory writer on the left making a fortune from his Soviet subsidies. The girl is a naive young thing straight off the Steppes. The two meet in a London coffee house during a Cultural Exchange visit. Like Herlihy, Wain is concerned with the commercialization of a myth but here the idea is political. "I know you can't sell coffee without some gimmick these days," says the owner of the Rebellion Coffee House. "The snack-bar business is a dead end without some plus element. . . . It's the kids who've got the money today, and what do the kids want? Pop music, yes, but that field's too crowded. What do they want next? And I knew the answer. They want to be big, bold rebels. They want to knock the established order. No soap and water, lots of placards and demonstrations. Makes 'em feel good and does no harm." Although Wain has some fun with his mindless rebels and with a tightfisted local Party secretary, the novel is slight and the comedy slightly grim. The main reason is probably that the hero is such a nasty egomaniac that he casts a pall over what might have been lively proceedings.

By comparison, the sexual exoticism of two recent Japanese novels make the previously mentioned books seem workaday. Junichiro Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man* shows how an impotent old man can still be titillated out of his senses by a young woman, while Yukio Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* describes how a teen-age boy purges himself of emotions by spying on his mother's lovemaking. Though the two writers are separated by more than a generation, both are concerned with the relationship between sensuality and society. And though both novels seem highly contrived they are nonetheless engrossing excursions into the bizarre.

Even before his death this summer, Tanizaki was already well known in this country for his subtle handling of unconventional sexual themes in *Some Prefer Nettles* and *The Key*. *Diary of a Mad Old Man* picks up right where *The Key* left off in exploring the murky area where sexual desire and impotence meet in advanced age. Here a respectable old man chronicles his obsession with his daughter-

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in-law and the masochistic pleasure he finds in being tantalized by her, even to the point of sacrificing the welfare of his family. The nuances of the old man's humiliation are worked out with considerable skill although the subtle integration of new and old Japanese culture is doubtless lost upon the average Western reader. Thus while the curious impact of the novel cannot be denied, some of the finer points of the oriental sensibility eluded me, particularly, the sensual thrill of looking far up a woman's nostrils.

Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* also has its curious moments but it seems less stylized and special than Tanizaki's *Diary*. The novel concerns the parallel development of an adolescent boy and his hero, a sailor who is courting his widowed mother, in relation to the established social order which both must confront. The sailor is tired of his sea life but fears settling down to a dull routine; the boy is tired of his childish dependence but fears growing up in numbing conformity. For both the sea is a symbol of freedom and the boy tries violently to give meaning to the sailor's fall from grace with the sea. Like Tanizaki's *Diary,* Mishima's novel is carefully structured, small-scaled, and slightly artificial. Yet the relationship between the sailor, the mother, and the sea is so poetically drawn that the novel's slightly hothouse beauty is not a serious defect. Only the boy, part of a gang of junior middle class Nietzschean *Übermenschen,* seems grotesquely unreal; but even that cannot deprive the irrevocably tragic ending of its impact. It is always hard to tell in these matters, but the translation by John Nathan either preserves or creates a breathless sense of poetry amidst a stifling sense of life.

In *Slowly, By Thy Hand Unfurled* Romulus Linney has created a remarkable bit of demented Americana in the form of a diary. The writer is an anonymous and unlettered Housewife out of the American past who has loved all of her children to death. Through her entries the story of her past life is revealed to us as it is to her until we both glimpse the truth of her remark, "O what do we know about each other what do we know about ourselves what is there for us now in this submission." The diary becomes the process by which she begins to understand herself. Slowly, by her own hand is her life unfurled.

Mr. Linney's novel is brilliant not only for its gripping account of a mind oscillating between lucidity and dementia but also for its authentic recreation of a psychic condition perhaps peculiarly American. Anyone who has looked at Jonathan Edwards' *Narrative of Surprising Conversions* will recognize immediately Linney's portrayal of repressed hysteria. Like her historical counterparts, Linney's narrator sees "a world . . . that is as flat and hard as the face of my clothes iron" but the heightened world in which she sometimes dwells is grotesquely ecstatic and the reader is fascinated and appalled by the dramatic fusion of the religious and the sexual, the commonplace and the mystical, the normal and the mad. If the novel fails to sustain its high

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pitch to the very end, it remains a disturbing and original work of imagination and recreation.

Disturbing and original in a different way is Earl Rovit's *The Player King*, "a novel about writing a novel about a novel." Like a piece of verbal op art, the novel projects at least three levels of action and ambiguity which intersect in an attractive abstract pattern. First, two voices discuss writing a novel in distracting Yiddish accents. Second, a novelist in Paris keeps a journal which concentrates on his marital difficulties. Third, the novel itself chronicles the adventures of a young man trying to find his errant wife in New York. The trials of Leo, the writer, and David, the hero, meet in two sexual triangles: Leo, Eva, and Doren become David, Letha, and Cadmium Green. The novel exults in its confusions and permutations until the reader sympathizes with David when he exclaims, "I could not then—nor can I even now —weigh all the ambiguities."

The Player King is an academic novel not in the sense that its setting is collegiate but in the sense that its final referent is not life but literature. The novel does not pretend to exist in relation to the real world but instead breathes the rarefied air of verbal play and literary allusions. Puns and ploys proliferate: Leo and Eva become David and Letha. David and Liza. David and Lethe. David and Lethal. Doren gives us entrée to C. Green or seagreen or Cadmium Green or Cad Green. Literary allusions abound—David is "apeneck Riegel," "a ragged Talmudist, scuttling across the floors of Holy Sees"—until we are unsure whether the hero is David Riegel or T. S. Eliot.

But *The Player King* is also academic in that it serves as a handbook on a recent trend in American fiction: the novel of serious play. It unwittingly shares with Bellow's *Herzog* not only a twin heritage of Hebrew prophets and Puritan divines—"Father Abraham" and "Solomon Stolid"—but also a Jewish cuckold and a gimpy villain: "Hero today, gonif tomorrow." Like Pynchon's *V.* and Heller's *Catch-22*, it delights in free associations and kaleidoscopic reality. And like Purdy's *Cabot Wright Begins*, it provides its own parodic book reviews that cut close to the bone though Mr. Rovit generously adds an interview with the author. Though not quite a *roman à clef*, the novel cracks as many inside jokes as a high camp movie: *Last Year in Marienbad* meets *Hallelujah the Hills*. Finally, *The Player King* collapses under the weight of its own cleverness, talks itself to death. Its verbal magic does not create something out of nothing, pull rabbits out of a hat, but rather folds its material into a smaller and smaller wad until it ultimately disappears. Mr. Rovit cuts the ground from under the reader—and the reviewer—so surely that he leaves himself nothing to stand on. Still, *The Player King* does contain multitudes of wit and intelligence, if not life; perhaps another indication that modern fiction has come of middle age.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Writers and Politicians

HERE IS HOW MR. DUPEE WOULD OPEN SUCH A REVIEW:

> Known to professors as essays, to members of the public as articles, and to writers as pieces, works of the kind collected in these three volumes flourish in the periodicals, big and little, new and old, at the present time. Making us all frenetically magazine-minded, they keep us thumbing through an ever expanding array of publications. When may we expect the piece of the hour in *Organic Gardening*, the indispensable article in *The Yale Review*? And having first enriched the magazine world, many of them achieve a second existence in omnibus volumes such as those at hand.

So writes Mr. Dupee about three other collections of pieces of the hour than our present three,[1] in the first of which these arch and uneasy sentences are inurned. Mr. Dupee may have thought he was clearing his throat, or being witty; but in fact he was prophetically expressing, with the nervous and threadbare whimsy of the professional reviewer, his doubts about reviews, reviewers, and the books they read and write. The moral is: Don't write reviews, or some day you will collect them in a book of your own.

As Mr. Dupee did. Others are strenuous; Mr. Dupee (when he isn't nervous) is urbane, he has no axe to grind, he is not taken in by large simplicities—by sex, for instance:

> Is . . . [Sir Richard Burton] by some chance a spiritual ancestor of the many who at present, and generally with reason, seek to accomplish a moral revolution, a "breakthrough" into realms of greater personal autonomy and sexual freedom? Possibly. There are old photographs of Burton—dark, beetle-browed, his left cheek deeply scarred where a Somali warrior had put a spear through it, his gaze intensified by what is surely the Evil Eye, his mustaches six inches long and good for twirling. Such photographs suggest those sometimes reproduced on the jackets of books by our scarier contemporaries, Fiedler or Mailer, their faces bearded, sweaty, hostile, furrowed with existential woe.

And he quickly determines that Burton's "sexual interests were connected with, and largely subordinate to, his sadistic ones. . . . What makes him so difficult a hero . . . is not his sexuality, hot or cold, but his insensate truculence, as of a human weapon in perpetual readiness to deliver."

[1] THE KING OF THE CATS, by *F. W. Dupee*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $4.95 THE MYTH AND THE POWERHOUSE, by *Philip Rahv*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $4.95. WRITERS AND POLITICS, by *Conor Cruise O'Brien*. Pantheon. $4.95.

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Just where this debunking leaves sex is uncertain, though Mr. Dupee is plainly skeptical about "breakthroughs"; and just how nearly we are to associate Fiedler and Mailer with the sadistic and insensately truculent Sir Richard is equally uncertain. At any rate, Mr. Dupee is not being stampeded by sex. If, for instance, you are concerned lest *Lolita* stimulate the wrong cluster of synapses, Mr. Dupee can assure you that "instead of putting the desires in an agreeable simmer, it acts on them almost like a cautery, sterilizing them with horrid laughter." Or if you'd like to know why *The Satyricon* is "at once relevant and irrelevant to an age like ours," the reason is that ours is

> an age divided at the top between philosophical sensualists and philosophical ascetics, Lawrences and Eliots, all of them intent on rationalizing, pro or con, something that in itself resists such efforts, namely sex. As Mr. Gore Vidal has remarked, "Sex is."

The point, perhaps, is to be a "free spirit" (Mr. Dupee is very fond of this term, which he uses often and never glosses); to muddle Lawrence, Eliot, and Gore Vidal into simultaneous triviality; to relax and enjoy the minor pleasures (like writing reviews) rather than to take lessons from what Mr. Dupee calls, in a casual and undeveloped aside, the "long line of British moral bullies and railers, from Hamlet to D. H. Lawrence."

Mr. Dupee's weapon, a small one but his own, is in perpetual readiness to deliver against Lawrence for reasons he never makes explicit. Does he picture a bearded, sweaty, hostile face furrowed with existential woe, rather like a Columbia undergraduate's? But he can smile upon a fictionalized biography of La Rochefoucauld by Morris Bishop; he is delighted with J. F. Powers and his "essential piety, his eternally springing hope"; he applauds the "inventiveness" of *Lucky Jim;* he concludes with Micawberish magnanimity that James Agee "had the sort of temperament which would have made him a great writer if he had been born just a little earlier." Mr. Dupee is a literary broker who benignly specializes in petty, fly-by-night companies.

Mr. Rahv, on the other hand, deals with the biggest corporate enterprises: Dostoevsky, Gogol, Chekhov, James, Eliot, Joyce, Hemingway, history, Hegel, Tillich, the *Zeitgeist,* God. Mr. Rahv's "powerhouse" is history: people "in retreat" from history, from "socio-economic realities," show "at bottom the fear of the hazards of freedom." (Sometimes Mr. Rahv says "*au fond*" instead of "at bottom." He has a stock of such coquetries: "far from displeased"; "not a few"; "all too patently"; "the effort . . . is *au fond* . . ."; "the effects . . . are writ large"; "at long last"; "a veritable *embarras de richesses*"; "the dramatist's integrative hand.") In an essay first published in 1950, he declares that "There are currently but two positions among us worth talking about: that of the secular radicals at one pole and that of the traditionalists on the other"; *i. e.,* those who defy "the permutations of

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the *Zeitgeist*" and those who surrender. If two former contributors to *Partisan Review* rejoin the Episcopalians, Mr. Rahv sees the *Zeitgeist* in action and "a state of extreme crisis brought on by the cumulative historical frustrations and calamities of the twentieth century."

Such an advanced case of moral elephantiasis is of course invariably accompanied by local swellings in the prose: "Thus the locus of value is displaced from the sacred or supernatural object to the institutional factor"; "Since that verse was written Faust has been virtually eclipsed by Mephistopheles in the role of protagonist of the higher productions of *Kultur*; and being exceedingly practiced in beating the high-minded at their own game, Mephistopheles is no doubt far from displeased by his rise to a position of glamor in the cultural hierarchy"; or (Hegel for tiny tots)—

> In criticism, as in any other sphere, it is never a unilinear, harmonious forward movement in which every critical concern is equally well served. On the contrary, progress is necessarily an uneven and irregular process: the advantage gained at one point is ordinarily paid for by regress or loss at another point.

Let Mr. Dupee exalt the "free spirit" as much as he pleases. Mr. Rahv insists on commitment in (so he would say) "all spheres"; in literature too, where the enemies are those who hold out against "the liberation of art from the socio-religious compulsions of the past." Yet Mr. Rahv is not less skeptical than Mr. Dupee about one sort of "liberation from the socio-religious compulsions of the past": "Salvation through sex," he says, "is among the more fatuous illusions of our age"; and he deplores the present freedom from censorship—

> We are living at a time when anything goes, when much of our theater is given over to a debased kind of Freudianism, when in the name of literature and art, no less, the right to pornographic writing is affirmed . . . .

Whether Mr. Rahv intends to propose certain new socio-religious compulsions to regulate or prohibit such outrages, he fails to make clear.

To give the *Zeitgeist* its due, one must grant that an occasional literary subject is able to penetrate the underbrush of Mr. Rahv's style and preoccupations. He writes intelligently, and even in bearable English, about Dostoevsky, for instance; as if Dostoevsky is political enough to free Mr. Rahv from the compulsion to question everybody else's timeliness and credentials. But his lapses are rare. In one of his pieces, Mr. Rahv labors to explain historico-culturally why criticism "has so low a survival value in comparison with other genres of writing." A reason he fails to mention is the prevalence, among critics, of such tone-deaf, metaphor-blind, ankylotic prose as Mr. Rahv's.

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History and politics influence the individual life, no doubt. Mr. Rahv is not only sure they do, but sure he knows precisely how they do. Mr. O'Brien is equally sure they do, but not sure precisely how they do. Modesty about one's power of judging the effect of historical events on persons is a necessary virtue, if only because the ego is not unwilling to use history, or any other set of external conditions, as a pretext for private decisions it has already made or would have made anyway.

Mr. O'Brien is a socialist; he was Dag Hammarskjöld's representative in the Congo; he is deeply interested in the independent nations of black Africa; he has served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana: he has made political and intellectual choices, and is attempting to live by their practical as well as theoretical implications. As an Irishman, raised in that stale theocracy, he retains years later a nostalgia for such journals as *The New Statesman and Nation,* which he calls a "great paper" (from Dublin, in the 'thirties, it must have seemed a gale of fresh air); but he has too much common sense to leave it without beautifully skewering, in parody, its British left-wing cant:

> "The King must persist in his investigation. The clerical interests, headed by the sinister and shortsighted Archbishop Tiresias, must be obliged to divulge the information they are improperly holding back. There is every reason for confidence that by holding firmly to his present course—despite the inevitable prophets of doom—Oedipus will stabilize the situation and ensure a peaceful and productive future for his family and for Thebes."

He has an eye and ear for cant: in the career of Whittaker Chambers for instance, whom Mr. O'Brien convincingly represents as, if not the father of lies, at least a favorite son:

> Miss West . . . refers, with cautious regret, to "the encouragement he gave his non-Communist opponents to believe that he was a liar." He gave this encouragement in the most effective possible way: to wit, by telling lies. Apart from the lie which his admirers have to admit and even insist on—"no espionage [by Hiss]"—there are many contradictions in his testimony, for which by far the simplest and most probable explanation is that he was lying. Perhaps the most flagrant example is that of his original charge against Hiss's brother, Donald Hiss, whom he said he knew as a Communist and from whom he said he collected Communist dues. Donald Hiss flatly denied that he had ever met Chambers, and no attempt at all was made to prove that he had; the thing was simply dropped. In his book Chambers, while not withdrawing the charge, coolly remarks that Donald Hiss's answers to the charge were "forthright" and reflected badly on—Alger Hiss, who by comparison had seemed to

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> hedge. Yet, if Donald Hiss was telling the truth—as seems to be reccognized in the adjective "forthright" as well as in the dropping of the charge—it was Chambers who had been guilty of a most odious lie: a lie, also, by no means explicable by the excessively merciful disposition, brought in to account for the *admitted* act of perjury. . . . Similarly, when Chambers made the charge—subsequently demonstrated to be altogether false—that Alger Hiss had swindled his stepson Timothy for the benefit of the Communist party, it can hardly be contended that this lie—again it cannot be just a legitimate mistake—is accounted for by his overflowing affection for his dear old friend.

And Mr. O'Brien finishes off "The Perjured Saint" with an historical anecdote for those who enshrine Chambers as an agonized Dostoevskian mystic:

> When Richard Pigott—the key witness in the "Parnellism and Crime" case of the eighties—was first exposed as having committed perjury and forgery, the judge asked him incredulously whether he thought certain of his admitted acts compatible with the behaviour of an honourable man? He replied:
>
> "No, my lord; I have never claimed to be an honourable man."
>
> The response has a certain bleak dignity, compared with the current style. In our day, a successor to Pigott replies: "I am something more than a mere 'honourable man,' my lord. I am a saint and mystic, engaged in a suicidal struggle against Absolute Evil. If you seem to trip me up in an odd lie here and there it is either because of some extreme, and pertinent, virtue of mine (like mercy) or because, at the time I was on the stand, I was in communion with God and didn't pay attention to what I was saying." And that, in the view of some respected commentators, would be the "clue" to the "troubling and enigmatic" business of perjury.
>
> I prefer Pigott.

Mr. O'Brien's essays on literary topics are painstaking, thoughtful, and unleavened. As for *The New Yorker*, he too dislikes it, and he scores amusingly against one of its belated defenders, Dwight Macdonald. There is a series of essays, written with unillusioned patriotism and instructive to the outsider, on Irish politics before 1916. The final pieces in the book are two addresses Mr. O'Brien delivered, in his capacity as Vice-Chancellor, before the University of Ghana. They are not notable for anything except a reserved and hopeful decency that lights up the familiar academic rhetoric, especially in the second address (the political circumstances of which, as Mr. O'Brien explains them in an introductory note, were difficult indeed):

> We hope . . . we shall enjoy a resumption of the pleasant and fruitful conditions of work which characterized the last academic

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year. But even if we face, as well we may, a time of difficulties and of painful silences, we should not allow ourselves to become despondent. Respect for learning, for truth, for justice and for intelligence are enduring human qualities which are present in ample measure in the people of Ghana. These qualities may be obscured for a time, but in the long run they are tougher and more resourceful than their impatient adversaries. . . . The values which a university represents, the values which we ourselves individually strive to represent, are infinitely more important than we are. They do not die when we die, or depart when we depart. We should be speaking loosely if we spoke of ourselves as their defenders, for it is we, rather than they, who need defence. We should be altogether wrong if we thought, or acted as if we thought, that these values could be in some way protected or upheld by evasion or compromise on principle. These values do not depend on what we do, or fail to do, nor do they need our feeble protection. Rather it is we who shall be judged—we who in our own minds and consciences must judge ourselves—by the measure of our fidelity to these values. . . . The various forms of instruction that go on at a university are important in themselves, both practically and as disciplines, but the soul and life of a university is the spirit of learning, which is the love of truth. If a university has instilled this spirit even into some of its students, then no matter what happens to the organization, or even to the physical shell, of the place in which the teaching was done, the university lives on, and will, in the fullness of time, flourish anew.

This man in politics means what he says. But then, so does Mr. Dupee or Mr. Rahv, decrying pornography, upholding the free spirit or knocking the *Zeitgeist,* complacently belletristic or belligerently committed (*engagé,* Mr. Rahv might suggest), full of instant solutions or the reasons why there can't be any, as confident and as mischievously off center as politicians.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

The Store of the Human

IN 1925 RILKE WROTE A HIGH-FLYING LETTER to his Polish translator Witold von Hulewicz, who was having difficulty with the *Elegies*. (The letter is reprinted by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson in their compilation *The Modern Tradition*.) "The things of our intercourse and use," Rilke explains, "are provisional and perishable; but they are, as long as we are here, our property and our friendship." Instead of destroying them, we must understand them and transform them. "It is our task to imprint this provisional, perishable earth so deeply, so patiently and passionately in ourselves that its reality shall rise in us again 'invisibly' ":

> And this activity is curiously supported and urged on by the even more rapid fading away of so much of the visible that will no longer be replaced. Even for our grandparents a 'house,' a 'well,' a familiar tower, their very clothes, their coat: were infinitely more, infinitely more intimate; almost everything a vessel in which they found the human and added to the store of the human. Now, from America, empty indifferent things are pouring across, sham things, dummy life. . . . A house, in the American sense, an American apple or a grape-vine over there, has nothing in common with the house, the fruit, the grape into which went the hopes and reflections of our fore-fathers. . . . Live things, things lived and conscient of us, are running out and can no longer be replaced. We are perhaps the last still to have known such things. On us rests the responsibility not alone of preserving their memory (that would be little and unreliable), but their human and laral value. ('Laral' in the sense of the house-hold gods.) . . . We are these transformers of the earth.
>
> *(pp. 191-2)*

I have quoted a good deal of this for its own sake, but also because an impressive number of American poets are currently engaged in accepting Rilke's challenge. I have chosen a number of recent books of poetry[1] which exhibit a persistent sense of laral value, a concern for those things which are slated for demolition. "The gods of China are always Chinese," Stevens wrote in a notebook, thinking of other gods.

[1] ABOUT THE HOUSE, by *W. H. Auden*. Random House. $3.00. KNOCK UPON SILENCE, by *Carolyn Kizer*. Doubleday. $2.95. VISIONS FROM THE RAMBLE, by *John Hollander*. Atheneum. $4.50. THE WOODEN HORSE, by *Daryl Hine*. Atheneum. $1.95 (paperbound edition). THE ASTRONOMERS, by *Edgar Bowers*. Alan Swallow. $2.50. THE PRIVILEGE, by *Maxine Kumin*. Harper and Row. $3.95. THE COMPLETE POEMS OF FREDERICK GODDARD TUCKERMAN, edited by *N. Scott Momaday* with a Critical Foreword by *Yvor Winters*. Oxford University Press. $6.50.

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Most of the poets under present review are deeply aware of the household gods, and aware of their destruction.

W. H. Auden's new book is entirely laral; the household gods are dead friends invoked now as voices of conscience. As he moves about his Austrian house, room to room, he thinks about things, their associations, doing now the thoughtful work that used to be done, he says, by architects and craftsmen; writing poems because poetry abides. The result is a kind of poetry doctrinal in its muted, self-ironic way; the most the present circumstances will allow. If readers won't go the way of *Four Quartets,* poets can't be expected to write a *Dunciad*; so they must settle for the minor mode, small virtues and small vices; like Richard Steele who, according to Samuel Johnson, "practised the lighter vices" and, according to everyone, practised the lighter virtues. If, in Eliot's terms, the Spirit killeth, the Letter giveth life, Mr. Auden answers:

> without
> the Spirit we die, but life
> without the Letter is in the worst of taste.

It follows from the last phrase that in the light-weight poems culture and civilization are minutiae of 'good breeding'; as in one poem he tells us (news to me) that

> (to 'borrow' stamps
> Is a mark of ill-breeding).

A book of this kind is bound to be a risk of taste; failure in this mode is a slip into album-verse, and there are three or four poems here which are febrile lines for febrile occasions. At this stage in his career Mr. Auden can do anything: he can sound like Osborne's Archie Rice, the old pro's charm laid on thick, the middlebrow sneer at Higher Thought. But when he checks himself and cuts the cackle, he writes some lovely poems; as if to say in a post-Yeatsian way, "Why should not old men be as nice as possible?" In this spirit he votes for the old immortal things: friendship, courtesy, compassion, love. The poems assume that even in a low-keyed time one may still believe enough to make a style; this may be Mr. Auden's answer to William Empson, who brought similar thoughts to a last-ditch conclusion. In the new poems style is a secular faith, possible at least in the small things, day by day, and the small things may turn out to be "the true *magnalia.*" On every page one can hear the noise of a drawbridge being pulled up, the bills paid, letters answered, calls returned, the house in an order pointed toward the end. Meanwhile one can, if he is Mr. Auden, preserve the civilities, retain good humour, and make an occasional joke. Meditating in the master bedroom, he says:

> Don Juan needs no bed, being far too impatient to undress,
> nor do Tristan and Isolda, much too in love to care

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for so mundane a matter, but unmythical
mortals require one, and prefer to take their clothes off,
if only to sleep. That is why bedroom farces
must be incredible to be funny, why Peeping Toms
are never praised, like novelists or bird watchers,
for their keenness of observation. . . .

And in Kirchstetten:

Babel, like Sodom, still
has plenty to offer, though of course it draws
a better sort of crowd.

This is Light Verse, but not light-headed or scatter-brained. Where Mr. Empson proposed to learn a style from a despair, Mr. Auden offers the same course at a more equable school, where despair is checked by good fellowship, friends, music, a room with a view, and money. (After a tour of the lecture-circuit, Mr. Auden waves to his audiences:

God bless the lot of them, although
I don't remember which was which:
God bless the U.S.A., so large,
So friendly, and so rich.)

Despair is Carolyn Kizer's place, especially in "A Month in Summer," a sequence of notations charting the end of an affair. This poem is beautiful as some short stories are beautiful; not too little, not too much, not even too much moderation, the experience is weighed and judged with remarkable tact. What is fine is not only the words but the tact which separates them in formal groups so that they do not sprawl along the road to claim our attention. And the loneliness is given partly by bare sentences and, more than that, by the pathetic advances of the victim toward other people, her father, her children, the visit home; and then the return to a place abandoned by the household gods. This sequence adds to the store of the human by the dignity of its tone, which claims only that degree of self-pity proper to a reasonable victim in pain. Miss Kizer's new collection also includes "Pro Femina," a causerie on Woman which is likely to become famous for all the wrong reasons. In fact, it is brash, clever, and entirely pointless, a mistake: it should have been handed over to a journalist. "Pro Femina" is Miss Kizer as High Priestess, trying to out-Beauvoir Beauvoir, the Voice of American Clever Women, the State Department's Woman in Pakistan. As good luck would have it, though, it is possible to forget "Pro Femina" and concentrate on the Chinese translations—imitations, as she rightly calls them—and the versions of Tu Fu, which are full of sweet cadences.

John Hollander's new book is all New York, Central Park, the Ramble, the garden and the city. What Mr. Auden calls the "baffle of being" is audible in these poems as "the humming of human time,"

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the buzz of recognition. Mr. Hollander's accomplishment did not need the proof of a new book; it was clear already in *Movie-Going* and too clear in *A Crackling of Thorns*. The danger-sign in the new book is a tendency to choke every vein with ore, leaving nothing to chance or tact: Mr. Hollander crowds everything in as if he were never to have another chance. The result is an occasional failure of scale; in many of the poems the "gifts of phenomena" come at the one price: High. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life," he says in one poem, but the form of life which corresponds to his current language is a dizzy riot of explosions. His chief instrument is a long, hold-all line which yokes together the event, the memory, the fire between two darknesses, but nothing is registered unless it offers itself as a bang, explosion, fireworks. The only proof of something is that it flares in the New York sky: in luck, we ourselves "burn/ For a time in the moment itself." This image is vivid at the start, but it becomes predictable and monotonous, an easy way of promoting an emotion. Mr. Hollander is very good with places and seasons, especially summers in New York when rooms are haunted with "the old tropes of despair." When his tact fails he is likely to go all clever-clever; as when he refers to the hot convertible "humming along the black macadam we all are" and we get it, black MacAdam, son-of-Adam; or the reference to poets "half in/ Death with easeful love." But this is tolerable in a book otherwise good. It is probably best to read the poems slowly and easily, one now and another again, rather than take the whole book in a session; the latter way will leave you feeling stuffed with sensibility. But the poems, taken in any measure, are impressive acts of memory and salvage.

The work of Daryl Hine is new to me, and very exciting. In poems like "Raleigh's Last Voyage" there is a remarkable feeling for the weight of human action, something of the quality of Williams's *In the American Grain*. Mr. Hine's themes are serviceable: things made, things grown, Body and Soul, the meaning of an individual life. Luckily, he writes a rapid, fluent line which can incorporate a wide range of object and feeling. He can be glib: after early Auden there is no point in composing lines like

> Intimate machinery, my body!
> Whose only raison d'etre is to be:

But this doesn't happen often. For the most part, Mr. Hine is prepared to take his cleverness for granted and to get on with the human job; here largely a matter of remembering what deserves remembrance. It would be pleasant to go through his book, quoting lines and phrases and whole stanzas. One passage will have to serve. This comes from a very fine poem, "In Memory M. D. 1872-1962":

> Heirs presumptive waiting in the hall
> Are everywhere apparent, fingering the treasure

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They had not leave to touch,
And of follies they can never measure
Murmuring How Much.
A pity that you cannot leave your pleasure
To whom you wish. The will engrosses all

No sooner than the testament is read,
The griefs you wished for and the consolations,
And no one cares if you were incurably sad
Under the humpty dumpty decorations,
Who wasted life and love on what you had,
Living alone without friends or relations,
But have enough of both now, being dead.

One of the problems in a poem of this kind is to know how much pressure to exert upon the facts. Some poets seem to think that the only way to make a fact give up its secret is by rape; others are content to point in the fact's direction. The poems of Edgar Bowers are particularly uneasy in this respect: he finds it difficult to 'let be.' He is engrossed with facts, but he nags them relentlessly; he is constantly insisting that facts will mythologize themselves for his sake, as his 'I' reaches for Hercules or Odysseus. When things refuse to mean beyond their contract, he frets; or invokes an 'angel' to lead his ache to speech. His first book, *The Form of Loss,* was a stiff poetry, I thought, for this reason; the lines regimented, more-perpendicular-than-Thou, the poet a Serjeant-Major whipping the words into order. The new collection is much more flexible: the best of them, like "An Afternoon at the Beach" and parts of "Autumn Shade," are middle-style meditations in which the relation between fact and poet (reality and imagination, in Stevens's terms) is equable. The shadow of J. V. Cunningham is visible in some of these poems, invariably to their advantage, especially in the epigrams. And the book is undoubtedly a great advance on *The Form of Loss.* "Autumn Shade" is not fully convincing but it has lovely moments, a poem of return, lying down in darkness, a laral poem filled with absence. The poet meditates in his father's house in Georgia:

In nameless warmth, sun light in every corner,
Bending my body over my glowing book,
I share the room. Is it with a voice or touch
Or look, as of an absence, learned by love,
Now, merely mine? Annunciation, specter
Of the worn out, lost, or broken, telling what future,
What vivid loss to come, you change the room
And him who reads there. Restless, he will stir,
Look round, and see the room renewed, and line,
Color, and shape as, in desire, they are,

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Not shadows but substantial light, explicit,
Bright as glass, inexhaustible, and true.

This is Mr. Bowers at his new best. The weaker poems try too hard and fly too high, like "Adam's Song to Heaven."

Maxine Kumin's poems are well known to readers of this journal. They are dauntingly fluent, running from one line to the next almost with nonchalance. Unlike Mr. Hollander, she needs to be read in some bulk; her poems, taken singly, are like courses in a Chinese dinner, notable for as long as they last. She has a section in her new book called "Conceits," and she is very nimble in conceited lines elsewhere; especially in a poem called "The Pawnbroker." But even here she can be a slight pain in the neck when, reading Conrad and expatiating on oysters and pearls, she says:

I was the bearer he paid up on demand
with one small pearl of selfhood. Portionless,
I am oystering still to earn it.

Her best poems are direct, their fluency a grace of tact and memory. I am thinking particularly of "Lately, At Night," a prayer to be released, at last, from an undying dead father. Here is the last stanza:

Father,
lately at night as I watch your chest
to help it to breathe in
and swear it moves, and swear I hear the air
rising and falling,
even in the dream it is my own fat lungs
feeding themselves, greedy as ever.
Smother, drown or burn, Father,
Father, no more false moves, I beg you.
Back out of my nights, my dear dead undergroundling.
It is time. Let the pirates berth their ships,
broach casks, unload the hold, and let
the dead skin of your forehead
be a cold coin under my lips.

Finally, an old poet newly among us. It is splendid to have a complete edition of Tuckerman. Yvor Winters's Introduction is a revised version, in some paragraphs, of the brief essay on "The Cricket" which he published in this journal (Vol. III, No. 3, Autumn, 1950). It reinforces a high claim for Tuckerman as one of the greatest poets of the nineteenth century. This is not the place for a detailed account of the poems. Elsewhere I have published a long essay on Tuckerman: there is no point in repeating myself. A reader who meets these poems now for the first time will be struck by the richness of their texture, the power of the sustained cadence which can hardly be compared with

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anything in American poetry until we come to the finest of Stevens's meditations. There are many bad lines, sudden lapses into Wordsworthese. But "The Cricket" is a masterpiece and many of the Sonnets take one's breath away. In the present context I am reminded that Tuckerman, perhaps more than any other American poet of his time, knew the meaning of a house, a place, the laral value of things. One of his finest poems, flaws and all, invokes a red house standing in ruin, the gods departed:

> The house stands vacant in its green recess,
> Absent of beauty as a broken heart.
> The wild rain enters, and the sunset wind
> Sighs in the chambers of their loveliness
> Or shakes the pane—and in the silent noons
> The glass falls from the window, part by part,
> And ringeth faintly in the grassy stones.

HAYDEN CARRUTH

People in a Myth

TWENTY YEARS AGO THE READING OF LITERARY CRITICISM was a serious occupation among young intellectuals in the United States. Maybe it still is in the centers of higher elegance, but certainly the prestige of the critics has declined. Readers are now more interested in the nonliterary forms of criticism, or in no criticism at all. In itself this is neither good nor bad; it is a change of fashion, an alternation between weakening and strengthening cultural momentums. The fashion will change again. Yet owing to the immense power of the critics at the height of their influence, the question of the rightful place of criticism in our cultural life has been discussed with a degree of animosity that is sure to seem laughable to our successors, and is already beginning to seem so to us. The anticritics, in their extravagance, have said that everyone can read everything without any technical guidance whatever. The critics, in theirs, have said that criticism is the key to art and reality. How absurd—and yet I am glad I lived through the period of criticism's ascendancy, quite consciously glad, because I know I gained from it a forwardness of literary outlook that I would not have had otherwise. Most serious readers my age feel the same way, I think,

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though few of us any longer study the books of critics, or even the reviews in quarterly magazines, with our former intentness.

What seems to me intrinsically more interesting and perhaps more important is the reason for the loss of momentum within the critical movement. The great writers of the critical era, working from the simple conviction that literary texts must be read well, i.e. analytically, came finally to the concept of the autonomy of the literary text. A poem was comprehensible solely in terms of its own structure and rhetoric. It was not quite the same as art-for-art's-sake, but nearly. This left them with a dissociation of art and experience, of literature and life, that seemed both embarrassing and fundamentally unbridgable. Consequently many of them, notably John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and R. P. Blackmur, turned their attention more and more toward philosophical issues, trying to find a means by which the self-contained work of art could once again be assimilated to experiential values. But these efforts lacked the drive of the earlier phases of the movement. Today, in looking back, we are likely to conclude, somewhat shyly, that the socially oriented critics, like Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, and Irving Howe, who did not push the theory of criticism so far, were nevertheless fundamentally more constructive, that is, more useful in defining literature as a normal element in the process of civilization; and this in spite of the shallowness of their readings of individual texts and in spite of the tedious way they ground out editorials on well-worn themes. Lionel Trilling, who combined both the philosophical and social tendencies, who indeed combined almost *all* tendencies, suffered an apparent failure of critical nerve, or at any rate never properly followed through the implications of his own concept of the "liberal imagination." Kenneth Burke, who perhaps progressed further than any other critic toward a settlement, ended by getting lost in his own system of esthetic and crypto-sociological discriminations.

Well, I imagine that will raise a few hackles. There is nothing easier than disposing of one's betters (and at times nothing more salutary). The point is that these men, taken as a group, did more to elevate the literary intelligence of the United States than any other group had done before or is likely to do for a long time again. If they left their successors in a hideous impasse, this was a logical outcome of the literature upon which they based their criticisms: the chief texts of the twenties and thirties, the literature created in the vacuum of post-Nietzschean nihilism. With the collapse of Nietzsche's idea of the new man, and with nothing to fill the void of the discredited metaphysical humanism of the three centuries before Nietzsche, experience was meaningless and reality was valueless. Artists turned to their art as their sole possession. From it and in it, they erected a "new reality," ranging from the psychic extrapolations of the Surrealists and the Jamesians to the concrete style of the Teutonic Expressionists; this, the self-contained esthetic experience, was *the* reality, all other ex-

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perience being illusion. Yet the "other experience" did not stop. In ever larger batches people were consumed by the ovens, with nothing in the slightest degree illusory about their death screams. The new reality of art began to fold up, and with it the critical notion of art's autonomy.

This was the time—not until about 1950 in this country—when the great critical momentum began to fade. No doubt what I have said is an extreme simplification, but it will give a setting to my feelings about two new books by one critic, Northrop Frye, who has tried very hard to go beyond the impasse.[1] He has done it by seizing one aspect of the critical theory of the forties and driving it to its furthest coherent extension. To my mind the result is very unfortunate, in spite of Frye's good humor, learning, and analytical facility.

The criticism of Ransom and Tate was deeply moral in tone and intent, essentially Arnoldian, even though their concept of the literary function led inevitably toward a split between art and experience, between esthetic and moral values. Frye has resolved the split by denying the moral factor altogether. For him art is simply and totally conventional, and has neither a moral content nor a moral application.

Both Frye's new books are series of lectures that add little to the basic views developed in such earlier books as *Anatomy of Criticism* and *Fables of Identity*. *The Educated Imagination* comprises six lectures originally broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which accounts for their somewhat chummy tone. They end with a plea for schools that will teach children to read imaginatively. Nothing wrong with that; people have been saying it for generations. It would be easy to conclude that if Frye's lectures have had any good effect on public education in Canada, so much the better. My own feeling is that the possible good which the final lecture may produce in education will be more than offset by the harm resulting from a general public absorption of the pernicious ideas about writing and writers in the earlier lectures. However, since these ideas are more fully and I think more seriously exploited in the second of the two new books, I shall write chiefly about that.

A Natural Perspective consists of four lectures delivered at Columbia in 1963. They are subtitled "The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance," and are an attempt to rehabilitate the comedies as texts for critical attention and to show how they, and indeed all Shakespeare's works, lead inevitably and reasonably to the consummation of the final romances. I use the word *consummation* intentionally, because Frye believes that *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest* are the real climax of Shakespeare's imaginative life, not *Hamlet* or *King Lear*.

[1] THE EDUCATED IMAGINATION, by *Northrop Frye*. Indiana University Press. $4.50. A NATURAL PERSPECTIVE, by *Northrop Frye*. Columbia University Press. $3.75.

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Frye's reasoning is based on his general theory of literature, which is that all works of imaginative writing are conventional structures. Perhaps the sense is conveyed better by saying that they are structures of convention. They have no meaning apart from convention. However, the meaning of convention itself is deeply rooted in the past, or in the Jungian primitive consciousness. Convention, in short, is what is left over from myth when people stop believing the myth; and myth in turn is what is left over from magic when people stop performing magical acts to induce fertility and stave off disaster. This is the progress of literature: magic to myth to convention; and it is essential to Frye's concept that the progression is upward, not downward. The refinement and manipulation of convention is the artist's role, and his success is judged by the ease and sophistication with which he performs it.

No one would think of denying that Shakespeare's plays are conventional. Aside from their rhetoric, they are full of oracular voices, changed or disguised identities, people risen from the grave, interpolated masques and revels, and so on. Frye elaborates this theme by showing that the comedies are in fact versions of regenerative myth. Each has three phases: an opening, in which society is characterized as tyrannous and irrational; a middle, in which social chaos prevails (mixed identities, frustrated courtships, imprisonments and exiles); and an ending, in which a stylized revel (a multiple wedding) signals the birth of the new society—a higher, ideal society that now becomes the "real" society, while the convention of the play casts the old, objectively known society of unreason into the shade of illusion. I cannot comment on the anthropological parts of Frye's theory, but within his framework of discussion I find many of his remarks about individual comedies genuinely enlightening, and I suppose this is the first test of criticism.

But it is not the last. Frye pushes his insight too far; he turns it into a system and permits himself to be ruled by it, with the result that Shakespeare becomes for him simply a fabricator, an entertainer, albeit one who works with the whole span and depth of emotional values. But the plays have no meaning, and the poet had no aim in writing them beyond the creation of conventional structures. At one point Frye resorts to the remark that Shakespeare wrote for money, and that when he had made his pile he quit and retired to the country. But this is terribly unscholarly. No one knows how much money Shakespeare had, or how much he needed. He was a successful playwright, and conceivably he had enough money to retire five years before he did: he could have gone to the country with the romances unwritten, in which case Frye would have been left without the consummation on which he pins his theory. The point is that if there is a movement, a shape, in Shakespeare's career as an artist, then something in the man must

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have been responsible for it—unless the artist's life itself is simply a convention!

Frye writes: ". . . the theme of wearing the horns of the deer in *As You Like It* and elsewhere may have more to do with this myth [Actaeon] than with stale jokes about cuckolds." Thus Frye manipulates his own convention-theory. Why is the Actaeon convention any more worthy than the cuckold convention, equally ancient and equally valid mythologically? Certainly it was not a stale joke, unless all the comic conventions were stale jokes. But Frye's whole point is that convention is timeless. He is betrayed by his own enthusiasm, and he betrays the reader with his sarcastic rhetoric.

Again: "The assumptions of a dramatist or the expectations of his audience may readily be translated into opinions or propositions or statements. If we do this to Shakespeare's assumptions, they turn into the most dismal commonplace. Hence the feeling expressed [by many critics] that, great poet as Shakespeare was, his philosophy of life, his opinions, standards, and values were bewilderingly shallow. The obvious answer is, of course, that Shakespeare had no opinions, no values, no philosophy, no principles of anything except dramatic structure." Could any critical theory be reduced further toward radical meaninglessness? Here is a Shakespeare who is a kind of theatrical automaton, dead to everything but the conventions of his art, a mindless poet. Frye says this not once but repeatedly. In the book on education: "Literature has no consistent connection with ordinary life, positive or negative." And here the context makes the sneer in "ordinary" quite evident.

Elsewhere: "Shakespeare seems to have had less of an ego center than any major poet of our culture, and is consequently the most decent of writers. It is an offense against his privacy much deeper than any digging up of his bones to reduce him from a poet writing plays to an ego with something to 'say.'" But Shakespeare—I'm completely certain of it, though I know I am going out on the same limb that breaks under every Shakespeare critic—would have considered this statement itself the greatest possible offense: the statement that the relationship between a poet and a man (an ego with something to say) is one of reduction.

One more quote: "In tragedy we recognize the importance of catharsis: pity, like terror, is raised, but it is ultimately set aside. In watching the ups and downs of York and Lancaster in the *Henry VI* plays we feel an automatic sympathy for the losers, qualified by all the evidence that one side is no less cruel and revengeful than the other. The losers are humanly vulnerable in a way that the winners are not. But sympathy for them, while it may be morally superior to contempt for them, would still coarsen and blunt the dramatic point. The dramatic point is tragic, and tragedy presents the event: this [particular action of fate] happens, whatever our feelings or moral reflections about it

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may be. If we ask why tragedy's presentation of this event is important, the answer takes us back to the myth of tragedy. Pity and terror are moral reflections about the tragic characters, and tragedy is not dependent on moral qualities." And still one more: "*Macbeth* is not a play about the moral crime of murder; it is a play about the dramatically conventional crime of killing the lawful and anointed king."

It is simply a misstatement of fact to say that *Macbeth* is not a play about a murder. What once gave the murder of the lawful king its efficacy as a ritual act was precisely the pity and terror evoked by it, the same pity and terror evoked by every repetition of it, in life or in art. The moral consideration is itself the timeless element, i.e. the convention. This has nothing to do with sympathy or contempt for the characters, but a great deal to do with our inability to define or to recognize, much less to discourse about, any action whatever except in the categories of experience: no more is known to us. How can we understand the dramatic event—the particular blow of fate—if we do not first understand the essential injustice, the immorality, of human existence: that is exactly what we mean by the tragic view; that is the substance of the play. And considerations of justice and injustice are moral considerations. Without morality, no myth; without experience, no convention.

I cannot for the life of me comprehend why a work of literature cannot be both conventional and moral, rooted in both myth and experience. Admittedly I am writing now more as a working poet than as a critic or reviewer. Yet I notice that throughout Frye's criticism he has worked more easily with Renaissance texts or courtly texts—texts highly conventional and by authors personally obscure—than with modern texts. Yeats, too, was a poet of bewildering opinions, a poet in many respects strongly conventional; but in the face of his letters and memoirs, to say nothing of more explicit avowals in the poems themselves, it would be difficult to call him a man without values. I cannot think of a poet worth his salt since the beginning of time who was not a man of values, a man with "something to say." Naturally they said it in the categories of human understanding. How else can you frame a discourse? How else, for that matter, can you frame an experience? Life itself, loving, hating, murdering, being murdered, is in its whole actuality conventional. We are all people in a myth.

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WILLIAM DICKEY

Talking About What's Real

WHAT IS SURPRISING ABOUT THESE THREE BOOKS[1] is that, beginning with what one would think were very different kinds of intentions, they arrive at such very similar conclusions. Only *The Lion Hunt* starts out as a deliberate investigation of the condition of poetry in our time—*The Suspect in Poetry* is a collection of passages drawn from periodical reviews of contemporary poetry, and is to some extent conditioned by the qualities of the poets available to it, and *The Lyric Impulse* is an historical study of the nature and problems of lyric poetry in English. But differences of intent tend to fade when we become aware that all three books are concerned with what they feel to be a *malaise* of contemporary poetry, and that their diagnoses of it, though not their prognoses, are very much the same.

The *malaise* they identify, though they describe it in different ways, may most easily be called academicism, and it involves a manipulation of language for its own sake, a concentration on the "games" aspect of language, rather than an effort at the direct communication of matters of importance. Dickey, for instance, feels "what a very sad thing it is that the poet in our time is an intellectual, and that his thinking sets him increasingly far from his subjects. If the poet's search is for 'truth' and 'reality,' and for means by which to communicate these, one must drearily conclude that he is now farther from being able to do it than he has ever been." Day Lewis arrives at a similar point: "To feel [the pure lyric] as it should be felt entails an act of joyful submission. Such an act of submission may be difficult for a modern reader, habituated by the earnestness or officiousness of literary critics to believe that no poem is worthwhile unless a fine dust of footnotes can be beaten out of it. But if the reader cannot make this surrender to simple poetry, his mastery of more complex kinds will be a little suspect, for it means that his channel to poetry's source has become clogged." And Holloway distinguishes two devils of poetry. The first, "in rainbow colours is the romanticized idea . . . of poet as handsome, unloved and soulful. An image now no more seductive than that of sadhu or berserk. The devil in black and white (inquisitorial figure) is poet all critical acumen, co-operative enterprise, familiarity with the reigning fashions, seminal figures, formative ideas. Of the two caricatures this is now the dangerous one. More. In a way it is so at all times."

There are several dangers connected with academicism, but they are

[1] THE LYRIC IMPULSE, by *C. Day Lewis*. Harvard University Press. $4.25. THE LION HUNT, by *John Holloway*. Archon Books. $4.00. THE SUSPECT IN POETRY, by *James Dickey*. The Sixties Press. $2.00.

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all alike in that they involve a loss of a fruitful kind of contact. Lack of contact with an audience may be the quickest to identify. Day Lewis says, "An immediate awareness of one's audience, and particularly of the need to win them, has for three centuries been less and less conducive to good poetry." Dickey's picture of the poet is of one who "has virtually no audience at all, and puts in his hours, almost always after work, in dogged misery, determined to realize himself and to communicate even if there is no one to communicate with."

Failure to make contact with an audience is serious enough, but it may be dependent upon a more central defeat of academicism: the fact that it fails to talk about what is *real*. Again, the complaint takes different forms in the three books, but I think the forms have very similar substance. That substance is that a poetry of the mind, of intelligence, cannot confront the most centrally *true* kind of human experience. Intelligence can argue or philosophize, but argument and philosophy have little to do with the communication of poetic truth. Dickey suggests this when he says, "One sees immediately that nature is never itself in Miss Kay's poems; nor does it belong to Miss Kay in any intimate and revealing connection. It belongs to the Proposition which it may be made to yield, if the poet rigs a satisfactory set of syllogisms." Day Lewis's definition of lyric (which, I should say, has no overt intention to restrict or eliminate the practise of other kinds of poetry) has a similar direction. The lyric "speaks with no irony or complexity of syntax: it is transparent, undiluted by any cerebral matter, unclouded by afterthoughts or the reflection of individual personality." Holloway does not make the point directly, but a parallel position can be seen: "And I fear, among the books I must read, things I hear said, questions I answer, world I live in, I fear to be led from art to dogma, and the Virgin's Frieze become no more than that decorous order, subduing and empty, doctrinal, formalized." Holloway's devil in black and white can deal with talent, but his fault is "to hedge over genius: at the worst, simply not to believe it exists." Critical acumen is a failure when it is confronted with genius, with what is instantaneous and *most real*.

The assumption about reality that seems to me to underlie these statements is that what is most real is what is at the same time most individual and most intense, that which is most single, least adulterated by the necessity of analysis or the search for pattern. Directed toward the subject matter of poetry, such an assumption is limiting. It argues that the most real poems can concern themselves with the relationship of man and himself, man and nature, man and God, man and a lover, but not with man and *they*, the body of other people who are involved with him in the complicated structures of society. "The response which makes our time our time," says Holloway, "is knowing the percentage for malnutrition, having the table that shows its correlation with size of community, comprehending the graph of its

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planned annual rate of decrease. But flash-point awareness of the real in its sunlit immediacy our time leaves to the amateur, anachronist, sentimentalist, poet. . . ." I do not know whether I can be aware of my relationships with *they* in a moment of flash-point awareness, for after all those relationships are complicated and cumulative. I do not even know that I can be aware of them with sunlit immediacy—Holloway's choice of this lighting seems in itself to weight the scale in favor of physical nature and against such human experiences as may be so unfortunate as to take place indoors. But whether I can obey Holloway's strictures or not, I cannot feel that experiences with *they* are less real than those which I have undergone in isolation, or that they are experiences which cannot successfully be dealt with in poetry.

Poetic man, man at his most real, would seem to be man involved in manageable relationships, relationships which do not contain very many factors, and which can easily have as their outcome a fusion into singleness. Dickey greatly admires, as I do, the work of Theodore Roethke, but the terms in which he describes Roethke's work suggest this desirability of manageableness: "The few objects that define his personality—stones, flowers, sunlight, wind, woman, darkness, animals, fish, insects, birds—tell his entire story, and the changes and similarities he finds among them are his poems." Roethke's greatness does indeed seem to me to lie in this impassioned fusion to singleness: "The mind enters itself, and God the mind." But how many of the *things* of human experience Roethke is persistently not talking about.

Relationships with God, with a lover, with nature, are in this sense manageable, being all one to one, and admitting always the possibility of complete union. Relationships with *they* do not seem to be so easily manageable, do not seem necessarily to have union as their proper end, and, if they are to be understood, do seem to require something more than flash-point awareness. Should man in society, as opposed to man in nature, be regarded as an impossible subject for poetry?

But perhaps it is only man in *our* society. Holloway suggests this, and the suggestion seems to me to be echoed by two statements of Day Lewis. Toward the beginning of his handsome and instructive discussion of the lyric he describes folk lyrics by saying that "they are all popular poetry in the sense that every member of a community could participate in them with enjoyment." Toward the end of the book he says, "Indeed, I am inclined to think that in the contemporary American folk-song, with its simplicity, vigour and inventiveness, lies the greatest hope for the lyric tradition." What seems to me most true about the *audience* for the contemporary American folk-song is that it is extraordinarily homogeneous. In its common assumptions and attitudes there may be again the sense of an agreed, and therefore manageable, community, a community to which one may respond as one responds to God or a lover, so that a union beyond the requirements of deliberate thought is achieved. I know, I persist in reminding myself,

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that Day Lewis is discussing only the lyric, and its requirements for singleness. But there are times (as when I read these three books together) when I feel a pressure on modern poetry to move only in the direction of the lyric, to avoid speculation, meditation, the activities of the considering mind.

Day Lewis seems here, perhaps only by virtue of his special subject, the most removed of the three poets from the phenomena of contemporary experience. That removal shows, I think, in his concluding defense of the lyric, a defense which is at the end of something, looking backward along it, rather than looking forward to something not yet defined: "In any lyric poem we feel perhaps a touch of irresponsibility. Life isn't so simple as all that, we may protest: what about the Bomb? malnutrition? the dangers of smoking? the divorce figures? Freud, and the marvels of technology, and the expanding universe? And here's this child, playing with coloured pebbles, expecting us to take him seriously! A touch of irresponsibility? our poet replies: what you are feeling is the touch of joy; and my play is serious. I am playing to delight and console you—myself and you. My pebbles can be a causeway, reuniting your divided self, and my own. Every good work of every artist is there to remind man of his roots, to refresh them, to satisfy—if only for a few years or hours—his perpetual need for wholeness."

If Day Lewis mentions only the retention of a present form and attitude as a means to wholeness, both Dickey and Holloway look toward the possibility of a poetry which will effect new unions, heal certain misapprehensions or divisions of the present. Dickey takes the shorter view, and, because of the subjective nature of his critical stance, is less defined in his positive conclusions. His negative conclusions, on the other hand, are both firm and profuse. He is good at seeing negatives, and he locates and demolishes a great many of them in this book. There, for instance, go the Lamont Poetry Prize and the Yale Series of Younger Poets, in the course of two sentences; there goes most academic poetry ("shows only a few American writers who could not be exchanged one for the other without appreciable loss"); there goes most beat poetry ("The rest, as far as I am concerned, are a complete and dead loss. . . .") There go . . . but I should consider my goal, and not simply look back at all the helpless passengers the captain has thrown overboard.

Dickey's requirements are characteristically made of the poet rather than of the poem, and they are moral requirements: the poet is to be honest, he is to confront reality, he is to say what he feels himself *compelled* to say. It is a Dionysian view, that of the poet used up by the poem ("His work brings home to us again the fact that the poet must, inevitably, be obsessed . . ."), and it is Dionysian, too, in having a sense of essentially religious communication as its end ("A sense of the sacred, which these men labor to make available, is probably the most impor-

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tant quality that poetry can possess. . . .") I do not think intelligence has much to do with this, if we think of intelligence as a weighing of valuable alternatives; what Dickey wants is commitment, and intelligence as a faculty that discards whatever is not centrally useful to the purpose that consumes one. The *kind* of poetry he wants is not easily definable, because it can take many forms as long as each is a true utterance. What can be said of a new poetry is that "if it is to prove of any value at all it will have to find a way to use the intelligence at full stretch, and to turn it into an instrument of liberation rather than constriction: a means by which the intellect can function without inhibiting whatever personal vision and imagination the writer may possess."

Holloway suggests a clearer picture of what a new poetry might be. Present poetry he sees as the tag end of the Romantic convention, weakened, diminished in substance and style from the Wordsworthian union of nature, morality, man, but still making the same fundamental assumptions. A new poetry will depend on the acceptance, the embodiment, of new assumptions: "The three great duties which lie before men in the present are to learn the absolute nothingness of any difference between humans save that between good and evil (race, religion . . . no one deserves to have the disgusting list so much as recapitulated); to recognize the new duty of an all-powered *homo sapiens,* custodian of a precarious, self-made Eden, to undertake the guardianship of all planetary life (when he was no more than one among its species, he might fend for himself, no more); and to realize that it now lies in his power alone to surround his existence with order and beauty." The recognition of a new world is already there, Holloway says, in the graphic arts. The possibilities of a new language are also there. It is time for a new vision, and in that vision what is now divided will be made whole.

The union of our divided selves through lyric simplicity, the union of our intellects and our personal visions, the union of a new language and a new understanding of the world—all of them are persuasive, and I feel often enough that I ought to be persuaded by them. But my sense of my experience is not only that it has not been unified, but that it is not going to be unified, and that the moment I allow it to seem unified I will have lost a perversity, a variety, a recognition of the thing beyond the pattern which will never allow any one pattern to become more than momentarily whole. I admire the synthetic imagination, though I do not think I have it. But as long as I don't have it, I must hope (together with *Sunday Morning,* with *Trivia,* with *De Rerum Natura*), that there will remain a place in poetry for the analytic imagination too.

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WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

Mellers and Music

FROM 1936 TO 1949 W. H. MELLERS was *Scrutiny*'s music critic, and during the early years of his tenure his work was often up to the magazine's high standards. He wrote illuminatingly about individual composers like Berlioz and Mahler, and also about the special difficulties the music critic has in keeping his account of a work "strictly relevant to the sincere response to the *musical* experience involved" and in avoiding "the mistake of trying to define in literary terms what the music means." But even from the start Mellers also showed a tendency to reduce the characteristic (and admirable) *Scrutiny* interest in the relations between tradition and the individual talent, and between the artist and the society in which he works, to a sentimental concern with trying to bring about an "organic" relation between composer and public something like the one he thought had existed in Europe before an "increasing preoccupation with the individual" made music "not so much the expression of the values and standards of a society as the expression of the individual's ego." This concern gradually took over his criticism and, as may be seen by comparing his early work with the two books *Music and Society* (1945) and *The Sonata Principle* (1957), it warped his judgments of individual composers and increasingly led him to wave aside the theoretical difficulties he had spelled out so clearly.

American music was a different matter though, and except for his vast overestimation of his friend Marc Blitzstein, Mellers managed to retain a good deal of his old precision and disinterestedness when dealing with it. "The most important point about American music," he wrote in 1939, "is that America has no musical past," and it was perhaps just this absence of a past that made American music seem less accessible to schematization. But now the arrival of his latest book[1] —very fat, very definitive-looking, very Borzoi—makes it clear that all this has changed. "The very fact," we now learn, "that [the American artist] has little sense of history . . . offers him a supreme opportunity." But American composers aren't given much chance to take comfort in this thought, for their "supreme opportunity" turns out, in the very next sentence, to be something of a burden: "When the artist is alone, with no religious or social orthodoxies to guide him, his moral responsibility becomes the greater." The real opportunity is in fact the one offered to (and seized by) the creative critic, who has absorbed the contents of a survey-course in American literature and decided that the specific "moral responsibility" of American composers is "to

[1] MUSIC IN A NEW FOUND LAND, by *Wilfrid Mellers*. Knopf. $6.95.

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face up to the central American themes: to something comparable with Whitman's 'multiplicity in unity,' with Melville's transcendental terror, with Hawthorne's conscience, Thoreau's and Dickinson's search for the music in the pool at noon, Twain's vision of the boy-child's integrity."

Keeping up this high tone, the first half of *Music in a New Found Land* presents American composers—or at any rate the significant ones, the ones who face up—as oversized granite-browed figures who are forever responding to Challenges, experiencing Realizations, and heroically forging the dialectic of Mellers' schema. The "two main 'positives' in the evolution of American music in the twentieth century" are Ives's "pioneer heroism" and Copland's "attempt to reintegrate, in a kind of musical cubism, the disintegrated fragments of the present"; and since Elliott Carter "shares with Ives a multifarious energy, an awareness of contradictory realms of experience, of life's protean mutability," yet "would impose upon it something like Copland's disciplined order," it is in Carter's work that "the values represented by Ives and Copland begin to come to terms."

Virgil Thomson, reviewing the book, marvelled at "the amazing rightness" of Mellers' particular judgments, which he remarked—with a humor that must have been unintended—were "all the more impressive from the fact that they are not very different from the estimates confidentially circulated now among the members of music's in-group." But the validity of the perceptions on which a judgment is based, and the clarity of the reasoning that gets us from perceptions to judgment, are just as important as the bare rightness or wrongness of the judgment itself, for a judgment can be blurred or distorted without being simply wrong. And it seems to me obvious, particularly after looking back at Mellers' early work, that the effect of all his relentless tendency-mongering and of the tumid writing that goes with it has been, just as you might expect, to blur and distort his particular judgments by making it hard to see where they come from or by making it clear that they come out of thin air.

In *Music and Society* he observed perceptively that the "individual note" in Ives's music is "the composer's vigorous robust personality, *as a man,* not as an artist," and that his music therefore "has a certain unity" but that "it has no *order* in the sense that the composer arrives at any organization in, or synthesis of, his experiences." And in *Scrutiny* he described things that can actually be heard in Copland's Piano Variations, and his judgment of the piece—whether one agreed with it or not—grew naturally out of his description:

> A gawky sequence of notes calling itself a theme is harmonized consistently in major sevenths and minor ninths, galvanized into a nervous hysterical life by complex syncopated rhythmic formulations. The music is undoubtedly "steely" and in a primitive way even exciting, but the convention is pathetically limited.

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I gather his judgment of Ives hasn't changed, but instead of expressing it clearly and unpretentiously, Mellers now elaborately hedges it by pronouncing Ives "an *embryonically* major composer," a puzzling phrase not made any the less puzzling by calling him "a New World's stumbling approach to a figure of Beethovenian power" or by saying that the trashy "Concord" Sonata, "though of course a much less significant piece, is the same *kind* of music as the 'Hammerklavier' Sonata." But now the Piano Variations have become Copland's "first masterpiece," and things that can't be heard are read in, so that Mellers' description of the piece will bear out the dime-store sociology on which his new judgment is really based:

> The American Jew, expatriated and alienated, accepts the life of the big city and of a machine-made civilization. From it, he must draw what succour he can. . . . So [Copland] starts, in the Variations, from the broken bones of a disrupted culture: in particular from the ambiguous thirds, sixths and sevenths of the Negro blues, and from the declamatory leaps of Jewish synagogue music. It is significant that both Negro and Jew are dispossessed peoples who have become, in a cosmopolitan urban society, representatives of modern man's uprootedness.

As for Carter, nervous italics are again used to place his very impressive First Quartet on a level with the "Concord" Sonata, as "the same *kind* of music as the late Beethoven quartets and sonatas."

But while Beethoven the Titanic struggler (himself rather granite-browed) helps Mellers inflate the works of some American composers, Beethoven the European composer helps him let the air out again. If the Emerson movement of Ives's Sonata is "Beethovenian music" only "in conception" and not "in realization," that's because Ives "has not —perhaps no one, living in a rootless world, could have—Beethoven's positive assurance"; and if the melody of the Thoreau movement "seems tentative, misty, groping as compared with the serene lyrical fulfilment of Beethoven's Arietta [in opus 111], that is as much as one has a right to hope for, in a divided and distracted world." Similarly, if Carter's piece "does not reach Beethoven's *Paradise Regained*—the lyrical efflorescence of the Arietta of opus 111 or the variations of opus 131," that's because Carter, "as an American," could not have as "direct [a] relationship to Beethoven" as could European composers like Bartok.

American composers are thus left with only Beethoven's scowl—which is about as substantial as the Cheshire cat's grin. But God help the man who tries for more, or who doesn't strike Mellers as having charted his artistic course by these crude stereotypes! Of Harold Shapero's superb *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* (which he misnames *Symphony in Classical Style*) Mellers writes:

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> the attempt [to use Beethoven as (in Stravinsky's sense) a mask] was misguided: for Beethoven's essence is a revelation of identity rather than a manifestation of tradition. Identity can never be emulated, only superseded. . . . Where is Beethoven without the sense of struggle? If Beethoven has won his victory, why fight the fight again? Shapero's refusal to stand on his own feet was an abdication; and it is hardly surprising that, since assuming the mask of Beethoven, he has written less and less.

As with Ives, the point is not the simple rightness or wrongness of Mellers' judgment—he calls Shapero's piece "impressive"—but the degree to which the judgment is obscured by flimsy reasoning and vulgar rhetoric. The identity-tradition dichotomy is not only surprising in an ex-Scrutineer but also (particularly in Beethoven's case) absurd. It and the stagy rhetorical questions that follow it embody a view of the way artists use tradition that could equally well lead Mellers to turn on Ezra Pound and demand: "If Propertius has lost his mistress, why fight the fight again?" And how can you take seriously a man who pretends to reveal, in a cheap handbook phrase, the "essence" of so complex and varied a master? If Mellers wants to find Beethoven without the sense of struggle, let him listen to the Eighth Symphony—the work of Beethoven's, incidentally, which Shapero's Symphony seems to me to evoke most immediately. But perhaps most offensive (leaving aside the unconscious cruelty of his last clause) is Mellers' finger-shaking at Shapero for abdicating—the opposite, one gathers, of facing up—and for refusing "to stand on his own feet." Since Shapero's Symphony not only makes imaginative use of other composers besides Beethoven but also bears the impress of a very fine and original sensibility, to speak of "abdication" is even sillier than to accuse Shapero of "assuming the mask of Beethoven."

The second half of the book, which deals with jazz and its offshoots, is even worse. There is the same simple-minded determinism swathed in thinky oppositions and speculations and allusions to give an appearance of complexity, but there is also Mellers' extraordinary ignorance of the music he is dealing with—which of course makes him puff all the harder and produces writing that is an eerie blend of Allen Ginsberg and Hugo Leichtentritt. On early jazz we have the familiar concentration on Negro musicians at the expense of white musicians: Beiderbecke's playing gets dismissed as "escape-art" of "frail charm and plaintive nostalgia" which "survives as much for social-historical as for musical reasons," and Jack Teagarden is not even mentioned once. On modern jazz, Mellers' need to exhibit Charlie Parker and Miles Davis as the "composing improvisor" and the "improvising composer" respectively—opposed figures representing opposed tendencies —produces the statement that "whereas Parker's genius was expressed almost exclusively through creative improvisation as a soloist, Davis's

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work has always involved close co-operation with composing 'arrangers' who had the talent to give him the material that would stimulate his improvisatory faculties," and Mellers concludes that it is the arranger Gil Evans "who has brought Davis's intuitions to artistic realization." But anyone familiar with his brilliant series of small-band records knows that Miles Davis is quite capable of realizing his own intuitions and that his genius, like Parker's, is expressed "through creative improvisation as a soloist." As for the offshoots, the real plum is a hilariously solemn, twenty-one page "analysis" of *Porgy and Bess* in the course of which we learn that "Bess, you is my woman now" is a "great song of adult love" because it "insists first on an awareness of personal identity ('you is, you is'), then on their togetherness ('two instead of one')."

Mellers also makes a great show of analyzing particular records, but more often than not the record just gets used as a stepping-stone to some soggy pronouncement about alienation in the asphalt jungle. These strange journeys can start from a valid perception—for example, from a reference to Lester Young's "intimately 'speaking' yet reticent fluidity that leads away from the ripe, full-bodied tone of Coleman Hawkins towards the more tired, neutral colorations of modern jazz." But that particular perception leads to this version of what happens on Basie's *Tickle Toe:* "Lester Young's tenor sax, expressive but pallidly 'lost,' tries to hold its own against the streamlined precision of the brass interjections—a savagely mechanized version of the relationship between soli and tutti in the baroque concerto." And that leads in turn to a fantasy about Basie's music in general: "The communal rhythmic orgy liberates the soloist, and yet at the same time threatens his individuality: just as the big-city worker is simultaneously freed and enslaved by industrial power. . . . What Basie's soloists are protesting against—or trying to hold their own against—is the hard, sharp, predatory vigour of an industrial society, which barks in the brass, crashes and snaps in the percussion." Now from the fact that Lester Young's recent imitators often sound "tired" and "neutral," or even "pallidly 'lost,' " it doesn't follow that in his best days he himself sounded that way—as anyone can learn by actually listening to *Tickle Toe,* where (as so often) he sounds powerful and carefree. And someone who bothered to listen to the record would also learn that the "brass interjections" Lester is supposed to be trying (and failing) to hold his own against don't even come during his solo, but that during his solo the brass section is in fact playing soft supporting chords behind him—which would dispose of the allegory about "industrial society" if it weren't ridiculous in the first place.

Sometimes, however, Mellers' analyses don't even offer a valid initial perception but only academic pomposity, misapplied technical knowledge, and plain factual error. "When," we are told, "towards the end of *Koko,* Parker and Davis play in parallel thirds the effect, within

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the dissonant-linear texture, is oddly pathetic. The thirds—which ever since the Renaissance have been associated with man's awareness of his humanity—sound little and lost amid the asphalt jungle's frenzy." What we are not told is that the phrase in thirds is a wry, rather flippant little riff that also appears at the beginning of the record as part of an introductory sequence; when the whole sequence is repeated at the end, therefore, the effect is to create a neat formalized close. And since Max Roach's deft and tactful drum solo—presumably what suggests to Mellers "the asphalt jungle's frenzy"—has been over for some time, it just isn't there for the thirds to "sound little and lost amid." As with the Basie record, Mellers ignores the temporal progression of the music and simply free-associates. Finally—the business about thirds and the Renaissance doesn't seem to demand comment—it's hard to see how anyone who had listened carefully to the record could think the trumpet solo was by Miles Davis: it's correctly attributed to Dizzy Gillespie by the compiler of the discography at the end of the book, who also got the title of Shapero's Symphony right.

In one of his best *Scrutiny* pieces Mellers wrote that it was "both unhelpful and impudent" for the music critic to "substitute for the composer's music a poem (or rather a prose-fiction) of his own creation which he imagines to be a literary version of whatever it was the composer 'meant.' " But it must be clear by now that this is precisely what Mellers himself has done, and that *Music in a New Found Land,* from its opening stipulation of the American composer's "moral responsibility" to its final page—which proclaims that "The only valid distinction is between those who stand for life and those who are against it"—is *literary* in the worst sense. The text is peppered with musical examples (and they must have driven up the book's price enormously), but most of them are either too short to be helpful or are inadequately introduced, and so they just ride like flotsam on the stormy sea of Mellers' prose. It's hard to believe that even Mellers felt them to be really necessary, for they are all taken from published scores and sheet music, which means that in the course of writing 130 pages on jazz he never once felt that an example would be useful enough to justify the bother of copying an improvised phrase or chorus off a record. Their only purpose seems to be to reassure us (and perhaps Mellers) that we really are sticking close to the text, all appearances to the contrary.

What are we to make of Mellers' strange career? How are we to account for this mishmash of hysteria and pedantry, and these frantic efforts to whip up undiscriminating enthusiasm and to make almost everything seem apocalyptically significant? In 1942 Mellers wrote in *Scrutiny:* "In general I'm not—at present—much concerned about music *criticism* . . . and I'd regard myself primarily as a musical *educator* as a preparation for criticism." He then went on to say that the first of "the two main tasks which musical educators are up

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against before one can think elaborately about the technique of criticism" is "to make the majority of intelligent people sufficiently interested in contemporary music to be willing to commit themselves to judgments about it (never mind whether they're 'right')." I think the moral is that any concern for education, no matter how well-intentioned, that is as radically separated from a concern for criticism and the preservation of critical standards as Mellers' "never mind whether they're 'right'" suggests, is bound to produce something other than education. Not that this is any news: it was one of the principles on which *Scrutiny* was founded and run. A review of *Music in a New Found Land* by F. R. Leavis would make very interesting reading.

EARL MINER

Roots in the Human Heart

FOR SEVERAL CENTURIES JAPANESE HAVE REGARDED the *Manyōshū* as the glory of their poetic literature, almost as if everything after this eighth-century collection were striving vainly to equal it. A recent scholarly edition with elaborate apparatus has sold many thousands of copies, and poems from obscure reaches of the collection are on the lips of literate Japanese. Shakespeare provides us with an English parallel, but he did not write over a millenium ago. Viewed within its language, the *Manyōshū* occupies a special place, and the translation of one thousand selections now reprinted is, with Arthur Waley's *Tale of Genji,* one of the two classics of translation from Japanese.[1]

The *Manyōshū* was probably edited in its final form some time before 785. It consists of 4,516 poems in twenty manuscript scrolls or books, embodying various complicated systems of arrangement and writing. In the main it includes poems from a period of about 130 years in what modern Japanese scholars distinguish into four periods, each telling something about the rapid development of civilization in Japan after the introduction of writing. The first period, approximately 630-680, includes poems very like the primitive verse surviving in other collections. There is little from this period to justify claims of greatness. The second, about 680-705, produced a fully developed poetry and, in Kakinomoto Hitomaro, probably Japan's greatest poet. The sudden emergence of so complex, mature a poet is one of the prime mysteries of Japanese literature. The third, about 705-735, saw

[1] THE MANYŌSHŪ . . . ONE THOUSAND POEMS WITH THE TEXTS IN ROMAJI. Foreword by *Donald Keene*. Columbia University Records of Civilization Series. Columbia University Press. $12.50.

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several major poets appear, though none surpassing Hitomaro. The fourth, about 735-760, produced in Ōtomo Yakamochi the last editor of the collection and a more subjective poetry which anticipates poetic development in the next two centuries.

The poetry of Hitomaro and most of the other great poets in the collection possesses at its best a balance between the poet's subjectivity and an external "real" world of objective fact that gives the *Manyōshū* its air of health and serenity. (Japanese also find in it a "sincerity" and "directness" that the poets' art belies.) The poems are mostly in two forms, the *chōka* or long poem, the longest in the collection being 149 lines, and the *tanka,* or short poem, of five. Each is made up of alternations of five and seven syllable lines, ending with a couplet of sevens. *Tanka* appear both independently and as envoys to *chōka*. How the forms function as poetry can be shown, as far as translations show these matters, by a poem of Hitomaro's, marked with his usual complex clarity and warm irony.

Seeing a dead body lying among the stones on the island of Saminé in the province of Sanuki.

O Sanuki of beautiful seaweed
On which I never tire to look!
So fair is the province
Because of its origin,
And so hallowed the land
For its divinity,
With the very face of a god
Enduring full and perfect
With heaven and earth, with sun and moon.

I, travelling from place to place,
Embarked at Naka's haven
And thence sailed on,
When with the tide the wind arose,
Blowing from the dwelling-place of clouds.
I saw the billows racing on the sea,
And white surges beat upon the shore.
In fear of the whale-haunted sea
We rowed, straining the oars,
And sought, of all the islands thereabout,
Saminé, the island of renown,
And on its rugged coast
We built a hut for shelter.

There I found you poor man!—
Outstretched on the beach.

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On this rough bed of stones,
Amid the busy voices of the waves.
If I but knew where was your home,
I would go and tell;
If your wife but knew,
She would come to tend you.
She, knowing not even the way hither,
Must wait, must ever wait,
Restlessly hoping for your return—
Your dear wife—alas!

Envoys

Had your wife been with you,
She would have gathered food for you—
Starworts on Sami's hill-side—
But now is not their season past?

On the rugged beach
Where the waves come surging in from sea
You sleep, O luckless man,
Your head among the stones!

The experience is that of a typhoon in Japan's Inland Sea, and the treatment of a kind that made some Japanese recite the poem from memory during the worst sufferings of the war. What neither this nor any translation could show is the remarkable manipulation of grammar in the poem, making everything in the *chōka* body of the poem (forty-five lines in the original) bear upon its last word: wife. In the original, this is also the initial word of the first envoy, which therefore picks up and completes the long sentence begun in the *chōka*. The irony of the poem is clearest in this envoy, since the season past is that of a man's life rather than of the humble greens. The second envoy looks back to the typhoon scene of the *chōka*. It concludes the poem in a tone difficult to describe, neither quite pathetic nor quite tragic, but with pity heightened by awe for the unbearable loss. The narrator is involved in the situation because of his experience of such a storm, and his involvement evokes our own. Such participation is made possible by the opening lines of the poem, which show that the danger and loss of life are universal and in a sense benign: Saminé is a beautiful and divine place to die. When irony is so affirmative we have more a maturity of vision than a literary technique, though one is founded in the other.

I am tempted to go into further details, since the poem is a great favorite with me. But I shall add only that it shows that at this point in Japanese poetic tradition a doubly private event—for the narrator and the dead man—might be rendered into poetry public in its shared

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religious and social values. Public poetry may be found in this and the remaining two periods of the *Manyöshū*, but not thereafter, its place being taken chiefly by a social environment for private poetry. It is notable that the *chōka* does not survive the shift to private poetry.

Hitomaro's successors sometimes imitated him and sometimes created highly personal styles. Yamanoe Okura, who spent some time in China, emulated Chinese didactic poetry in his "Dialogue on Poverty," one of the very few works of social comment in Japanese before modern times. In theory it is Confucian in its objection to poverty and destitution. So it would be to a Chinese poet. But Okura's resolution is in its resignation more Buddhist and Japanese. His staccato, crabbed, and yet eloquent style partly comes through in translation, as in the first envoy to an elegy on the death of his son.

So young he will not know the way;
Here is a fee for you,
O courier from the Nether World,
Bear him on your back.

Yamabe Akahito introduced a vein of lyric description. Although the style contributed to the loss of the *chōka,* it needs no apology in itself. The translation from *One Thousand Poems* may be set by the original transliterated.

Masurao wa	The men of the court go forth
Mikari ni tatashi	To join the royal hunt,
Otomera wa	While the maidens promenade,
Akamo susobiku	Trailing their pink skirts,
Kiyoki hamabi o.	Along the clean waterside.

The last great poet of the *Manyōshū,* Yakamochi, is commonly more diffuse and less quotable. But his versatility runs the full range of Manyō poetry and places him next to Hitomaro among its poets. His original contribution was a greater subjectivity, a greater personalism. Where Hitomaro had rendered private subjects public, Yakamochi seems to make even so public a subject as receipt of official travel orders into an expression of personal feeling.

In obedience to the imperial command,
Though sad is the parting from my wife,
I summon up the courage of a man,
And dressed for journey, take my leave.
My mother strokes me gently;
My young wife clings to me, saying:
"I will pray to the gods for your safe-keeping.
Go unharmed and come back soon!"
As she speaks, she wipes with her sleeves
The tears that choke her.

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Hard as it is, I start on my way,
Pausing and looking back time after time;
Ever farther I travel from my home,
Ever higher the mountains I climb and cross,
Till at last I arrive at Naniwa of wind-blown reeds.
Here I stop and wait for good weather,
To launch the ship upon the evening tide,
To set the prow seawards,
And to row out in the calm of morning.
The spring mists rise round the isles,
And the cranes cry in a plaintive tone.
Then I think of my far-off home—
Sorely do I grieve that with my sobs
I shake the war-arrows I carry
Till they rattle in my ears.

Envoys

On an evening when the spring mists
Trail over the wide sea,
And sad is the voice of cranes,
I think of my far-off home.

Thinking of home,
Sleepless I sit,
The cranes call amid the shore reeds,
Lost in the mists of spring.

As the envoys show, the beauty of Yakamochi's poetry has rendered all into a personal vision in which even natural description is symbolic of the private heart. English terminology is deficient for describing Japanese and Chinese poets. We can only say that with Yakamochi poetry has become, in our terms, wholly lyric.

Like the other major poets, Yakamochi was a courtier of middling rank. Unlike some of them, he was also a scholar, collecting dialect poems from remote districts, poems of the humble, and any verse that seemed worthy of preservation. Such social and regional variety has perhaps been over-extolled by Japanese admirers of the *Manyōshū*, since the greatest poems are composed by courtiers and exemplify the only real variety—within standards of high quality. This is a point of evaluation dividing most Westerners from many Japanese, who often find the great achievement of the *Manyōshū* in a poem like—

Let no rain fall to drench me through;
I wear beneath my clothes—
The keepsake of my loved one.

They admire the "truth" and "sincerity" of such verses. To me they

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seem conventional and undistinguished. It seems as if the formalized indirections of Japanese life lead by compensation to over-prizing of naiveté.

The one thousand selections from *The Manyōshū* give in any event an unusually fine representation of the best and most characteristic poems of the collection. For once, the reviewer must praise the choice. My selection would differ, but the selection is excellent on grounds of quality, historical importance, and range. This really is a mirror of what in the *Manyōshū* lives in Japanese minds. The fact is the more to be remarked, because the translation was originally published twenty-five years ago at the height of nationalistic feeling. As Donald Keene writes in his brief but perceptive Foreword to the new printing, the introductory matter sometimes reads strangely, but the translations stand up well. Japanese scholars have been active in the intervening quarter century, making the romanized versions of the Japanese (still gathered unusefully at the end) even more doubtful, and providing means for many new interpretations, both of the period and of individual works. Yet even to one whose practice of translation from Japanese differs, the renderings seem remarkably pure in language and accurate enough. The examples quoted have fairly set forth the range of success.

In addition to being the first of the major anthologies of Japanese poetry, the *Manyōshū* is a prime source for historians, anthropologists, and linguists. For these reasons, as well as for merit and the special place it has in Japanese hearts, it has deserved translating. It was a happy thought of Columbia University to bring the volume back into print. From it alone one could judge the truth of the words of Ki no Tsurayuki in 905.

> The poetry of Japan has its roots in the human heart and flourishes in the countless leaves of words. Because human beings possess interests of so many kinds, it is in poetry that they give expression to the meditations of their hearts in terms of the sights appearing before their eyes and the sounds coming to their ears.

In this sense, the human heart and the *Manyōshū* belong to readers everywhere.

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COMMUNICATIONS

Dear Sirs,

The point of Richard Kostelanetz's piece "Militant Minorities" seems to me valid and, if the argument had been adequately supported, as it could have been, the article would have performed the legitimate journalistic function of airing a topic needing to be aired. But in my opinion he has spoiled the argument with inaccuracies and distortions.

His analogy between last generation's New-Criticism Southerners and today's New York Jews has validity enough to be worth mentioning in passing, but some of his statements and metaphors on both sides of the analogy are offensive. He employs the word "collusion" in suggesting something of the ways minority groups, including both Southerners and Jews, try to assert their importance in the literary world. A specific instance of collusion with names and dates is one thing; the general suggestion is another. (Among the groups he mentions is "San Francisco;" I knew and know most of the San Francisco writers and intellectuals who would be likely to come under that label; to the best of my considerable knowledge this group was not in collusion of any kind, either within itself or with another group; what we had in common was our province.) Kostelanetz concludes his argument about the Southerners by knocking down some straw men: "Few would still innocently proclaim that everything in the emergence of the Southern literati was pure chance." Few indeed. He uses the word "invade" of the ascendancy of both Southerners and Jews. Of the Jews he says: "what first may have deceived people. . . ." He says: "only on the textbook front did the Jewish literary critics seemingly fail to engineer this sociological revolution," a revolution which the Southerners had successfully engineered. In any case, Kostelanetz presses the analogy between the two groups so far ("precisely the same pattern") as to suggest a greater cohesiveness among the Jews than he demonstrates or than I think can be demonstrated. For the solid coherent reliable mutual admiration which characterized the Southerners has in New York only a confused existence intellectually and none socially. (For example, the severest attack I know of on Leslie Fiedler was by Harold Rosenberg in *Dissent*.) Those involved in this world are apt to view it as "a Hobbesian jungle," in Irving Howe's phrase. What strikes me, a visitor, even more strongly than the intensity with which these Jews attack and praise one another is the attention they pay to one another: if a writer is Jewish he's likely to be written about a lot and talked about even more.

Kostelanetz speaks of "embarrassing, almost desperate puffs, invariably by Jewish critics" of Harvey Swados; maybe; but early in his career Swados got something better than a puff, he got a fellowship from *The Hudson Review*, edited by Gentiles, not from *Partisan Re-*

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view or any other Jewish-dominated magazine. Kostelanetz exaggerates the praise accorded to Philip Roth's first book; it was hardly "unbounded." He accuses by hearsay: "the publication of the late Robert Warshow's *The Immediate Experience* was supposedly delayed so that Lionel Trilling could certify that, yes, Warshow . . . was among the best minds of his generation." If publication was delayed for this reason, say so and prove it; if you don't know for sure, keep your mouth shut. Apparently Kostelanetz does not think it is reasonable practise for a publisher to try to get an influential critic to write an introduction for a book by a little-known or out-of-fashion writer; for my part, if I were an editor of Rinehart Editions I can imagine waiting quite a while for Howe's admirable introduction to that edition of Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. (Incidentally, Trilling's judgment on Warshow's essays was in my opinion just, and was in simple fact nothing like what Kostelanetz implies in his Ginsbergism.) He argues, with strange logic, that because Yiddish is "decidedly antiphilosophic," therefore Saul Bellow's rich prose does not have origins in Yiddish. He touches on the fact that the commercial reason a lot of books by and about Jews are published is that far more books are bought by Jews than by any other identifiable group in the United States and that they buy a lot of books by and about Jews; but the sentence in which he mentions this is the second in a misleading list of three items having to do with "the Jewish movement into communications and education." (Buying books is a movement?) He speculates that one reason Negroes will not be "the next minority to push themselves upon the cultural scene" is that "many of the Negro's cultural aspirations were tied to the Jewish rise," which is news to me.

Commentary is by far the most important Jewish intellectual magazine (it *says* it is Jewish), and Kostelanetz attacks its editors. "It would not be unfair to say that certain critics, such as Theodore Solotaroff, have built a respectable reputation solely upon intelligent essays about Jewish experiences and/or Jewish authors." Of the several essays and reviews Solotaroff has published in recent years, I can think offhand of half a dozen which are on non-Jewish writers and books; moreover, he has seldom given any book by a Jewish writer such high praise as he recently gave to the posthumous stories of Flannery O'Connor, a Catholic (in *Book Week*). Kostelanetz accuses Norman Podhoretz of dividing the literary world up into Jews and philo-Semites, GOOD, and non-Jews and those too critical of Jews, BAD. To check this, I have gone through *Doings and Undoings* and find that Podhoretz is by no means that simple-minded. It would be defensible to argue, as Kostelanetz does not, that Podhoretz is excited by Jewish intellectual essayists more than by any other sort of contemporary writer and that he undervalues contemporary fiction (to both of which the exception is Norman Mailer); but it is a distortion to say, as Kostelanetz does, that Podhoretz gives "blunt dumps" to Mary Mc-

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Carthy, Dwight Macdonald, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John O'Hara. Kostelanetz also takes a couple of swipes at Irving Howe, editor of *Dissent*. Even if his attack on Solotaroff, Podhoretz, and Howe were supported, he is in an awkward position to launch it; he has not published in either *Commentary* or *Dissent,* whereas he has published in *Partisan Review*—whose editors he does not attack.

It is time for someone to detail the truth about the present importance of Jews in the American literary world, calmly and unvengefully to disentangle commercial power from intellectual influence and both of these from real literary excellence, so far as this can be done. An example of the tone in which such an article should be written is in *Commentary* for September 1965, "Sentimentalizing the Jews" by Robert Alter, the main point of which is not very far from the main point of Kostelanetz's article. Alter supports his opinions by reference and quotation, he clearly defines his subject, he restricts the application of his metaphors, he makes his points openly. Misreadings can never be prevented, of course, but a writer in Alter's position, and even more one in Kostelanetz's, should scrupulously discourage misreadings by every means at his command. The people Alter criticizes would be hard put to dismiss his argument on the grounds that it is unsupported, and those inclined to use his argument for illegitimate ends of their own—anti-Semitism is a great breeder of unscrupulous misreading—would be hard put to find in it nourishment for their fantasies.

Let's face it. Saul Bellow is a pretty good novelist even if a lot of his Jewish friends do praise him. Wordsworth was a pretty good poet even if Coleridge, his best friend, did say so loud and long.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

New York, New York

Dear Sirs,

As one of the few critics in America without academic affiliation (and, thereby, a ready audience of eager students) and as the part-author of one outrageously unreviewed hardbound book, I am, of course, grateful to discover that *someone* reads quarterlies and that my remarks have merited such close attention from a writer I respect. I find it ironic that George P. Elliott should be my antagonist here, for the article grew out of a question posed to me by an English novelist I know. "Why," he asked, "are good writers such as William Styron and George P. Elliott so rarely talked about?" With this in mind, I trust I can address the author of "Who Is 'We'?" not as an enemy but as a possible friend.

Instead of aiming at the heart, Mr. Elliott fires wildly, with a

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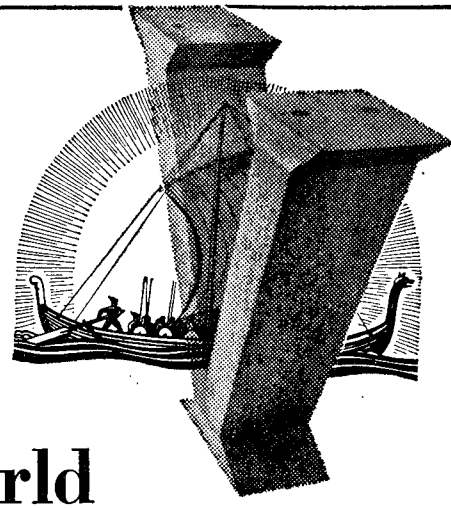

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semblance of desperation, only wounding with a few of his shots. *Mea culpa,* the reference to Lionel Trilling's introduction was unfair without further evidence, and I should have referred to a published source, William Pechter's article on "The Art of Film" [*Contact* (III, 4), p. 65]. Also, I should have mentioned what occurred to me soon after submitting the piece, that Norman Podhoretz's notion of the essayist blends with what he conceives to be a truly Jewish intelligence (alas, inherited by less than all Jews). Mr. Elliott is correct in criticizing my imprecise assertion that, "Many of the Negro's cultural aspirations were tied to the Jewish rise." I should have said what has often been noted by others, that many Jewish intellectuals have tied Negro cultural aspirations to their own, as the pattern of critical response to James Baldwin, among other examples, would surely indicate. Indeed, the underlying theme of Irving Howe's notoriously paternalistic attack on Ralph Ellison was the implication that Negro writers were not, metaphorically, Jewish enough in their devotion to group-advance, and among other symptoms of such projection of Jewish aspiration upon other minorities (and criticism for their failure to act as the Jewish minority did) I would put Nathan Glazer's chapters on Negroes and Puerto Ricans in *Beyond the Melting Pot.*

However, on many other points I must disagree with Elliott's criticisms. The military metaphor of "invade" is not inappropriate; nor was invasion unjustified, considering how, as I pointed out, the world of culture had previously been partially closed to both Southerners and Jews. Also, in a magazine whose audience is as knowledgeable as *The Hudson Review*'s, I assumed there would be little need to document the charge of "collusion"; and I am sure that Elliott knows of many more examples than his posture of innocence would suggest—surely more than I do. Third, the fact that one Jewish critic happens to write severely of another is no sign of general dissension. Indeed, one criticism I would have of Jewish-Jewish intellectuals is that they discuss *primarily* each other, whether favorably or not. I have been told, on good authority, that last year at the New York YMHA symposium on the contemporary novel, a panel of critics, largely Jewish, discussed only Norman Mailer and Saul Bellow—a range limited and boring at best, dangerous at worst; and as Elliott surely knows, "making it" in America depends more upon being discussed widely (notoriety) than upon receiving favorable reviews in a few discriminating journals (respect). Then too, that Harvey Swados should have received a fellowship from *The Hudson Review* I find evidence of nothing, absolutely nothing except *Hudson*'s generosity. My point against the *Encounter* reviewer was that he allowed the myth of Jewish intelligence wrongly to persuade him that Yiddish was a philosophic language; and, personally, I would trace the philosophic preoccupations of *Herzog* largely to Bellow's interest in philosophy. In my remark on Theodore Solotaroff, I wrote that his more "intelligent" essays were

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on Jewish subjects—Schwartz-Bart, Malamud, Philip Roth, Harry Golden, the state of Jewish-American letters (the unsigned survey in the *TLS,* 1959), memoirs from concentration camps, etc. (I know of no one who found his essays on Porter, O'Connor or Elliott especially perceptive); and I did not suggest his taste was as narrow as Podhoretz's. Furthermore, read that *Do-Do* book once again, Mr. Elliott; man, those "dumps" of McCarthy, Macdonald, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and O'Hara are pretty "blunt"; and Robert Alter's sniping attack on Irvin Faust's "Jake Bluffstein and Adolf Hitler" fails to confront a major theme of that story, perhaps a notion too distasteful for a *Commentary* contributor to mention: the possibility that the Jew may sometimes invent imaginary anti-Semites to explain his own unease with existence, just as the anti-Semite creates imaginary Jews—the ghosts who screw up the machine. (My own article, I trust, talked about *real* Jews.) In retrospect, Alter's strategy toward Faust is not dissimilar from Elliott's toward me—by discrediting an author's acquaintance with peripheral matters, they hope to discount both the core of his argument and his right to authority. Finally, I nowhere suggest that Saul Bellow does not deserve his reputation. What I said was that the impetus, on the part of certain critics, to establish him as our greatest contemporary novelist has some suspicious motives and a kind of mad enthusiasm, both of which are inappropriate to true literary discrimination. As Norman Podhoretz himself wrote in 1959, "There is, indeed, a sense in which it may even be said that the validity of a whole new phase of American culture has been felt to hang on whether or not Saul Bellow would turn out to be a great novelist."

May I allay Mr. Elliott's suspicions, and reveal that the reason why I did not mention the editors of *Partisan Review* is, quite simply, that I find no conspicuous evidence in their writings of what I decry; and let me add that I have elsewhere reviewed Philip Rahv's essays in less than sycophantic language. Elliott may have spent too much time among careerists to believe what I shall now say; but I happen to be a writer not particularly affiliated with any point-of-view, magazine or clique; and I can easily escape from any pigeonhole he would use to confine me. Although I have contributed to the *Partisan, Sewanee, Hudson* and *Kenyon* reviews, as well as *Midstream* and *Commonweal,* and other magazines besides, I find it rather difficult to get my dearest pieces published and impossible to develop any continuous arrangements; I enormously resent the cliquish character of the American literary scene and, to judge from my recent mail, so do many of my contemporaries. Indeed, an antipathy to all exclusive and self-aggrandizing coteries, rather than to the Jewish-American movement alone, was the ultimate origin of my attack.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

New York, New York

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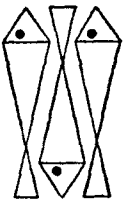

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